

TIME, SPACE, TEXT MAPPING CULTURAL PARADIGMS

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Editors

CHINMOY GUHA

TIRTHA PRASAD MUKHOPADHYAY



UGC ACADEMIC STAFF COLLEGE
AND
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA



TIME, SPACE, TEXT : MAPPING CULTURAL PARADIGMS

Edited by

CHINMOY GUHA

TIRTHA PRASAD MUKHOPADHYAY

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Foreword

The University Grants Commission has allocated special funds for 'reading materials' to be supplied to the participants of each Refresher Course. However, isolated materials like photocopies of a few lecture notes or summaries thereof do not always serve much useful purpose because these are often incoherent, abridged and incomplete, and therefore fail to convey an integrated message of the course. In order to make the reading materials more useful and valuable to the participant teachers, the U.G.C. Academic Staff College and the concerned departments of the University of Calcutta have jointly undertaken a sustained programme for publishing a series of books based on the contributions of the Resource Persons of the respective Courses.

The present volume, entitled *Time, Space, Text: Mapping Cultural Paradigms* is an important addition to the publication series of the Academic Staff College, University of Calcutta. The present book has been possible because of the untiring efforts of the Editors, Dr Chinmoy Guha and Dr Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay, and the cooperation and help of the Resource Persons and of the faculty members of the Department of English, University of Calcutta.

This book has been published with materials relating to Space-Time perspective. This perspective can be exemplified as follows: if we tried to conceptualize 'normality', we would find that this concept (normality) is governed by the principle of relativity. What is normal to the Eskimos is not always so to us Indians. To offer one's wife to the guest for sensual pleasure is the best

hospitality with the Eskimos and therefore 'normal' to them. But to do the same is quite 'abnormal' and even a 'crime' in our culture, and so 'normality' involves Cultural (Spatial) Relativity. Again, in India, once the *Suttee* was considered to be quite 'normal', though at present it is regarded as an abnormal and illegal practice. So the *Suttee* involves Temporal Relativity.

It is in the vein of the above context (time-space relativity) the present volume-contents are to be interpreted and conceptualized.

I am sure this volume will be useful and enjoyable to the teachers and the students as well.

24 January 2008

Professor Dipes C. Nath

Honorary Director,
Academic Staff College,
University of Calcutta.

Preface

This book collects some of the papers on *Time, Space, Text*, presented at the 13th Refresher Course organized by the Department of English and the UGC Academic Staff College, University of Calcutta in September 2006.

We remember the hugely enthusiastic response generated by the Course not only because of its wide scope and the possibilities of multiple dialogues it offered, but also due to a series of extraordinary face to face encounters with some of the living legends of our time. It is not often that one meets a Mrinal Sen, a Jean-Marie Gustave le Clézio or a Buddhadev Dasgupta in the classroom.

No less memorable were the encounters with authors like Nabaneeta Deb Sen, Amit Chaudhuri, Alka Saraogi or Nabarun Bhattacharya, theatre personalities like Suman Mukhopadhyay, scientists like Dipankar Home, artists like Debashis Deb, scholars and critics like Amiya Dev, Yasodhara Bagchi, Sourin Bhattacharya, Gautam Bhadra, Manabendra Bandopadhyay, Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee, Swapan Majumdar, Subhadra Kumar Sen, Samik Bandopadhyay, Ratan Khasnabis, Amitava Roy, Shovanlal Datta Gupta, Bhaskar Chakrabarty, Manasij Majumdar, Kishore Chatterjee, Swapan Chakrabarty, Sankarlal Bhattacharya, Shanta Mahalanabis, Ishita Mukhopadhyay, Subha Chakrabarty Dasgupta, Jayanta Sengupta, Uday Kumar, Samita Sen, Dipankar Purkayastha, Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, Anasuya Guha, Amrit Sen and Nirmalya Narayan

Chakrabarty, not to speak of the professors of the Department of English.

Not all of them could find time to submit their texts. Yet what we have managed to put together in these pages will stimulate research and thinking. In the context of the erosion of boundaries across genres, and a new site of multidisciplinary, the book will refocus on the spaces within the discourses without sealing them off from other kinds of cultural practice.

We are really delighted to have as our guest Dipesh Chakrabarty, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor, University of Chicago. We remember with gratitude the encouragement we received from Professor Sudeshna Chakravarti, Head, Department of English, Professor Dipendu Chakrabarty, Sir Gooroodas Banerjee Professor of English, Professor Bimal Kumar Mukhopadhyay, former Ramtanu Lahiri Professor of Bengali, and other colleagues. Special mention must be made of Professor Krishna Sen, who not only suggested the theme of the 13th Refresher Course but also helped in finding the right title for this volume.

We express our appreciation of the endless support we received from Professor Ashis Kumar Bandopadhyay, Vice Chancellor, Professor Dipes Chandra Nath, Honorary Director, UGC Academic Staff College, Professor Suranjan Das, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs), Professor Tapan Kumar Mukherjee, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Finance), Professor Arun Bandopadhyay, former Dean of Arts, and Professor Biplab Chakrabarty, General Secretary, Calcutta University Teachers' Association.

This book would not have been possible without the help and support of Sushanta Poddar and other members of the Academic Staff College. We also express our gratitude to Bivash Datta, Director of Arunima Printers, Susanta Saha, Assistant, Department of English, and our



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UPE Research Fellows Sayan Chattopadhyay and Himalaya Jana. We must also warmly thank Professor Pinaki De, who graciously agreed to do the cover design.

24 January 2008

CHINMOY GUHA
TIRTHA PRASAD MUKHOPADHYAY
Department of English,
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TIME, SPACE AND THE CHEMISTRY OF CINEMA

MRINAL SEN

Better late than never.

I could never realise that malarial fever could be that severe. It lasted just a week, but that was not all. As in war, the war is not paid for during wartime, bills come later. After twenty-five days I am afraid I am still continuing to pay the bill.

I have at last come to the class room at the end of a three-week session of yours — must be very delightful, quite playful, and, indeed, extremely rigorous. And, for obvious reason, on the concluding day I have taken the back seat and have now been asked for what you may rightly call my funeral speech. But, frankly, I shall tell you that I am no academic, I am no researcher in a strictly academic sense, no scholar, and, lastly, to tell you about my confusion worst confounded, I have no flair for archival probe.

But, true, I feel enthusiastic about the topic : Time and Space and how it relate to the chemistry of cinema

As, now, I proceed with my subject, I think I should make a blatant confession about my own self : all my life till this very moment I have lived in the instant present. Coming to my frequent encounters with the past, distant and not so distant, and even when I have visited the museums and have been to the sites of historical relics, my spontaneous reactions have always been not to look at them as museum pieces but as contemporary phenomenon. In a way, whether or not I sound smart, I am what I am, and I try to keep my eyes virgin.

To make a beginning, I am tempted to narrate an incident, and for that matter, knowing the man as I am, my speech or rambling thoughts will be liberally punctuated by anecdotes to illustrate my points.

I narrate the incident as I just mentioned, but I am not sure if it will make any sense to you.

Not very long ago — that was in a week-long programme in Rome, Shabana Azmi, the actor, and I, we, took a day off and went to the monumental centre of ancient Rome. On the way we were talking about Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* which we saw the day before — my fourth viewing and Shabana's perhaps the second. Now, walking through the imperial ruins we came to the Great Square of the stupendous Colosseum. As you know very well, this was originally a part of the villa of the emperor Nero — the most controversial among the worst Roman emperors. With bits of history on our back, Shabana's and mine, we stood before the Great Square. None of us spoke a word for a few moments. We just could not. Moments passed and it was Shabana who broke the silence. "Fantastic!", she said in a whisper, almost to herself. This immediately reminded me of a short sequence of my film *Bhuvan Shome* when, watching a delapidated summer resort of a local Raja raising its truncated head at the top

of the imposing flight of stairs on the sea beach, Utpal Dutt, my actor, said the same word, same way, almost to himself. Here, standing before the historic Square, Shabana said it and lost no time to pull out a note book from her wallet and rushed to the nearest tablet to scribble quick notes. I saw her moving from one tablet to another, and from one board to another, taking brisk notes from the writings of tablets and boards displayed at various points. As she was doing so, and got lost behind the huge pillars, I kept looking at the sprawling ruins, all opulent details, craggy shapes all around, broken walls, decayed arches, all threatening immediate collapse.

Like a child collecting shells on the sea beach, even braving waves, Shabana was running about, up and down, collecting history.

I did nothing of the sort, just kept walking and looking around, enjoying the lovely scene.

On our way back to the car walking through the ruins, Shabana asked me, where did I disappear? Listening to the music of Nero's fiddle?

"I heard the sound of helicopters", I said.

"One trailing behind the other", said Shabana, "swooping low over the ruins."

I said, "It is a pity there was no hanging Christ for dumping at the Vatican."

"And no Marcello, no paparazzo", Shabana added.

We looked at each other and we were happy that with no effort we walked into the world of *La Dolce Vita*.

"What a lovely contrast!", she said.

Obviously, Shabana meant the present—the helicopters—against Rome's 2000-year-old past.

"What a coincidence!", I quipped.

"Coincidence, you say?" She asked.

"Yes, it proves my point."

"Proves what?"

"Proves that the ruins and the helicopters are one and indivisible—a contemporary phenomenon."

Whether Shabana agreed with me or not was not important here. The fact was that we loved the dialogue we improvised, paying tribute to Fellini and *La Dolce Vita*.

Assuming that the dialogue we improvised did neither prove a point nor did it make any sense, here I recall another time, another incident, apparently of no consequence. Apparently of no consequence, but deep within me, it was something that caught me unawares and suddenly opened the door between the past and the present.

It happened a long time ago. It was a simple incident, but not so simple to explain.

It happened at Sarnath—that great Buddhist centre near Varanasi where the Buddha, having attained the Enlightenment, delivered his first sermon and turned the Wheel of Law. That was my first visit to Sarnath. That was a day in January, in 1952. And that was before I came to cinema.

At the historic site I was all alone, pacing up and down, and watching the Columns and the all-time-famous Lion Capital. Aided by a guide, I then made my way down the steps which led to the rooms arrayed in a line. Those were the rooms, I was told, where the Buddhist monks—the chosen few, were housed. Walking down the alley I—then a Medical Representative of a lesser known medical firm—stood before a door, a small door, just the frame, with small opening.

"Can I go inside?", I asked the guide.

"Yes, of course", he said and made way for me.

I was taller than the door and so I bent down to walk in. And that was precisely the moment when I was suddenly caught unawares by some mysterious force I do not know what. The moment I bent down, the magic worked : I turned a monk. Believe me, I turned a monk—just for a moment. Walking in, as I stood straight, I

returned to my own self—a dawai-walla who could make some time free between two visits to doctors' clinics and just came here.

It was amazing, it was a ritual that I performed, a ritual that I enacted, a very simple ritual, that of bending down, with absolutely no religious compulsion—and the magic worked. Just bending down which the monks at the time of the Buddha used to do as many times as they required during the day. And that was that. I did it and that was a day in January, 1952. I did it, I re-created it—a kind of reenactment, and instantly a mysterious door opened before me—the door between the distant past and the instant present. And, without my knowing it, I attained—should I say—the enlightenment !!!

And this is precisely what I have been trying to say—to connect the past with the present—through two of my seemingly inconsequential anecdotes—to connect the past with the present and, in the process, to grow wiser and, through wisdom, get understanding.

“To Connect”—that is the thing.

Here, in this connection, I ask you to bear with me as I pull out a few leaves from my diary and tell you stories that meant a lot to me.

It was in 1965. It was in Dhauli, near Bhubaneswar, the capital of Kalinga, where the Emperor Asoka fought a battle, the sanguinary battle, and the last battle before he turned a devout Buddhist.

I went to Dhauli on a very specific mission. I was assigned by the Government of India to make a film on 5000 years of Indian history with an emphasis on the officially approved concept of Unity in Diversity, of continuing synthesis running through ages. To build the film, I decided to go places, all over the country, and capture all that I felt I could use—museum exhibits, bits from lots of historical relics, historical documents and all. Dhauli was very much in my programme.

It was all quiet in Dhauli when we arrived—my crew and I. In 1965 it was almost barren—with just one temple somewhere in the site. It was all undulations with cattle grazing and the river Daya flowing silently. In the middle of the site, on a little mound, stood the historic figure of a white elephant—the Buddha motif, and one of emperor Asoka's edicts, inscribed on a rock. That was possibly the thirteenth edict.

This particular edict, as you know, is one of Asoka's most important edicts erected on rocks and pillars in different parts of his pan-Indian empire—all under the Emperor's direct supervision. This, like all others, is to evince the great metamorphosis which the all-powerful emperor went through, immediately after the cruel war of Kalinga. The text, as in other inscriptions, was a kind of atonement for what the emperor considered his misdeeds and was also his pledge. "I, Priyadarshi, Beloved of the Gods ... " — that is how the text begins, and what follows is a claim that the king looks upon his "subjects" as his dear children, and that he who will do any offence to his "children" — officer or whoever he may be—will be punished. These and more of such sweet and assuring words form the text—all messages aimed at restoring peace among his "subjects" and to ensure, in the emperor's own words, "that people may act according to it and that it may endure for a long time." And the Emperor continues, "And one who will act thus will do what is meritorious."

I sat before the holy rock and tried to find a vantage position for the movie camera. The blazing sun and the sultry weather made us feel extremely uncomfortable. There was no vegetation around, no tree to offer us any shade.

Suddenly my eyes caught a woman, very old, skin parched, seized with infirmity—sitting a few yards apart. What business she could have there at such an awkward

place and at such awkward time other than keeping an eye on the cattle grazing beyond!

I looked at her and smiled. Instantly she smiled back. It was so contagious. And the chemistry worked.

I do not remember how it worked but it did work: the door opened—the door between the past and the present—and mysteriously did I go back to the past, more than 200 years before the birth of Christ. Thus, turning into an “ancient”, I looked into a woman who lived in Asoka’s time. It was strange but, true, I was irresistibly drawn into this strange world of Asoka, the emperor. The woman, now transformed, looked oppressed, wronged and humiliated. It was she who lived to see a monstrous war—a war that left her drained of all hopes for survival. All that she was left with were the ruins all around and blood flowing down the river Daya. Then, again, travelling a very long way and leaving the past far behind, it was she, the same woman, keeping an eye on the cattle and sitting at the foot of history—the edict number thirteen—the edict that carried not a word which might have acted as a kind of constant provocation to those in Kalinga—those who survived the horrors of the monstrous war. There was absolutely no reference to the battle of Kalinga in the edict number thirteen. Strange Strange, indeed!

I returned to my own world. I came back to my own self—one who had been assigned the production of a long film which must carry a glowing sequence on Asoka’s conversion to Buddhism.

And, there, a few yards away, sat the old woman, looking into me, with the holy rock and the white elephant standing solidly behind.

Significantly, as you very well know, quite a number of texts elsewhere on rocks and pillars have described the “deplorable” facts of slaughter, death and deportation of thousands of people during the battle of Kalinga, but, as

I said before, there was no such mention in the text at Dhauli, the place of occurrence. I realised that it was a studied omission, a very deliberate omission, on the part of the Power—the Power that would eventually rule the people and the land.

All that I did well within my knowledge was to invest the past with contemporary sensibility.

“To connect”, as I said earlier, is the thing. I borrowed it from the English writer Forster who said it long time ago. The great Russian scholar and filmmaker Eisenstein described a fascinating process—transition from Physical Perception to Intellectual Perception. To illustrate his point Eisenstein quoted exhaustively from Tolstoy, Maupassant, Eliot,—from other arts too, and even drew examples from everyday experience you and I pass through.

Most importantly, Tagore said it beautifully, in his inimitable style, in his *Jiban Smriti*—his autobiographical memoirs. It was a strange sensation, strange experience that he described. One day, very early in the morning—and that was when he was very young—he was watching the sunrise from the balcony of their Sudder Street house in Calcutta. As he was watching the sunrise, suddenly and mysteriously strange things began to unfold before his eyes. In his own words: “All these days since my childhood I got used to watching things through my eyes only. But today I learnt to see things through Chaitanya... Chaitanya.”

My bag is still stuffed with anecdotes. I just take my pick—just one—one which relates to the question of “connection”. I seek your indulgence.

An eminent intellectual, for whom I have got profoundest respect for his erudition, organised some official fund to go to the most backward area in the State of West Bengal and spend on the recreational programme for them. Once he put up screenings of a few films for

them—the unlettered among the tribals. Several excerpts from films like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and *Que Viva Mexico*, Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* and Cluzot's film on *Picasso* were organised and shown.

The screenings, according to the presenter, were a big success. True, the tribals did not have the benefit of the words spoken in the films of Ray and Cluzot, nor did they have any knowledge of the uprising of the Russians in 1905 and of Mexican history. Yet, so the presenter claimed, they understood the films. He watched them intimately as they saw the films, "wide-eyed, open-mouthed". And, as they came out after the screenings, he could clearly see "the reverence of a new experience on their faces".

The point that was made by the presenter was more or less the following:

The tribals were unlettered, raw, apparently without the least discipline. But they did follow the films, could grasp the messages captured in the films, could, in fact, "connect". And isn't it what Forster said about the understanding of art—to "connect"? To connect is the thing, it is what a writer expects his reader to do. While watching the Odessa Step sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, the tribals could immediately "connect" the same with the battle which their forefathers had fought against the British and the Indian landlords anti traders. And the very sight of the Mayan rituals in Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*—mask dance and all—made them remember their own rituals that relate to birth and death. Similarly, for reasons of their own, *Pather Panchali* could easily touch their souls. The magic, therefore, that worked was their ability to connect.

To me, all this is over-simplification. I admit the tribals saw the film "wide-eyed and open-mouthed". I shall never contest his observation when the presenter said that he could see, "the reverence of a new experience" on the

faces of the unlettered tribals. But what were all these due to? I am firmly convinced that the viewers in that tribal belt, in that particular situation, were awed by the "wonder" that was cinema—multitudes of pictures appearing in quick succession and eclipsing soon after, a pair of eyes covering the whole screen, an angry crowd growing enormous and in a moment reducing itself to a small dot and a host of "marvels" as revealed through technological performance called cinema. And then, in *Picasso* there were colours and shapes and forms presenting a large variety of illusions for the uninitiated. All these were, indeed, great wonders not for the habitual viewers but, for sure, for those tribals who had no opportunity to watch a film before.

Here, I am tempted to recall a funny incident which Robert Flaherty, that great documentary filmmaker, described so beautifully and vividly.

Once, that was many years ago, Flaherty accompanied an expedition team to the Arctic region. There he made contact with the head of a group of Eskimos, named Nanook. He then shot a large length of film with Nanook and his people as his subject, and came back with the whole lot of exposed material. Having edited the film—and he called it *Nanook of the North*—once again Flaherty accompanied the same team to the Arctic—this time, with his edited film and a 16-mm projector. A show was organised by Flaherty for Nanook and his people. For them that was their first—and perhaps the last—exposure to a film show—not just watching the film but also watching themselves. That was an experience which Flaherty could never forget. Nanook and his people kept watching the visuals on the screen and, as often as they could, looked back to watch the projector. Suddenly came the sequence of the seal-hunting on the screen. Watching the sequence, there came a moment when Nanook and his people could no more remain just spectators. They

grew restless, they became tense. And the moment the screen-seal, in a desperate bid to escape, rushed towards the camera, the Eskimos squatting on the floor of the improvised theatre lost not a second to jump on the screen to catch it. What followed was a big laugh, both from Flaherty and the viewers who, just at that moment, grew wiser.

Now, to conclude, Nanook's kind of "connection" that I have just described is not really what you look for. Nor do I. It is all gross, crude, just physical, and nothing more. And granting the fact that the tribals inside the makeshift theatre watched the films "wide-eyes and open-mouthed" with "the reverence of a new experience on the faces", you and I strongly feel that such a scene is just watchable, and the matter ends there. The point, as I see it, is to go beyond the physical confines and, then, to chase the "truth". It is a process, a journey, brief or long, simple or complex. This needs to be acquired. It is a quality of mind that needs to be cultivated.

To say it in the simplest possible manner — and I warn you not to read it too literally- here is what the filmmaker Eisenstein prescribed: It is reading the time that is obligatory (Intellectual Perception), and not just watching the two arms of a clock rotating at defined angles (Physical Perception).

In other words, it is the dialectical leap that is what is our concern.

ROMANTIC ARCHIVES: LITERATURE AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN BENGAL

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

Versions of this paper were presented as the Mary Keating Das lecture (2003) at Columbia University, at a meeting of the South Asian Studies Group in Melbourne, and at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. I am grateful for audiences at these meetings and to James Chandler, Gautam Bhadra, Rochona Majumdar, Muzaffar Alam, Bill Brown, Tom Mitchell, Gauri Viswanathan, Kunal Chakrabarti, Sheldon Pollock, Clinton Seely, Carlo Ginzburg, and Biswajit Roy for comments on an earlier draft. Special thanks to Anupam Mukhopadhyay in Calcutta and Rafeeq Hasan in Chicago for assistance with research.

1. Introduction

A letter from a friend in Calcutta recently put to me this question: Will the investment in Bengali literature that

marked Bengal's colonial modernity survive the impact of globalization?

Bengalis have lost their appetite for [Bengali] literature, [said my friend]. "The reading habits of the Bengali public have changed so much that were someone to write a *Pather Panchali* [a famous novel published in 1927] today, they would not be able to attract the attention of readers unless a well-known filmmaker created a hyped-up film version of it. ... I am sure you will agree that literary work needs a certain environment for its growth. This environment that you have seen in Calcutta in the past is now disappearing. And nobody seems to care.¹

The letter voiced a sentiment that is not uncommon among my literary minded friends in the city. It seems plausible that Bengali language and literature do not possess the cultural capital they once did in the state of West Bengal. The magazine *Desh*, a periodical that for long has attempted to capture the cultural essence of the literary-minded sections of the Bengali middle classes—the so-called *bhadralok*—suddenly changed a few years ago from being a weekly to a biweekly publication. Why? I asked another Bengali friend who seemed informed on these matters. I was told that the readership for the magazine was a declining and ageing readership. Younger people did not read the magazine, not in the same numbers anyway.

For a long time, the comportment of being a modern Bengali person has had much to do with certain kinds of personal investment in Bengali language and literature. Sometime in the nineteenth century, in the mist of times that for the *bhadralok* have been partly historical and partly fabulous, things happened in British Bengal that made

1. Raghav Bandyopadhyay, letter to author, 26 June 2002.

books and literature central to modern Bengali identity.² Two factors helped to reinstitute the nineteenth century and its consequences into the cultural ambience of late twentieth century Calcutta. One is the fact that the emancipatory optimism of the Left—elaborated in the revolutionary poetry and songs of the 1940s that retained their popularity into the sixties—drew heavily on the heritage of the nineteenth century, until the Maoist Naxalite movement (c. 1967–71) began to question that inheritance. The other was the Tagore centenary year of 1961. The poet, and along with him the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were reinvented for my generation of educated Bengalis in myriad ways by the All India Radio, the Gramophone Company, the government of West Bengal, and a host of other major institutions in the city.

It is difficult to avoid the impression today that educated, well-to-do families are divesting from Bengali language and literature when it comes to their children's education. The new and global media help unfold new possibilities for cultural production. The more celebrated new Bengali writers often write in "global English." At any rate, a sense of distance from the nineteenth century and all that it stood for is now in the air among the young. Even the book, which perhaps became the most favored material cultural object of educated Bengalis over the last two centuries, is portrayed as a thing of the past in the words of a song of a contemporary Calcutta band :

The time was 1972.

Browning, Tennyson, Arthur Miller

Romance, travel, and crime-thriller

2. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe : Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), in particular chaps. 5–7.

But devaluation made the rupee *bekar* (useless)
Sen only reads the newspaper³

There is something interesting—in the context of our present discussion—about this song, released in 2001. It ostensibly describes a cultural memory of a loss, the loss of the book, attributed in the song to the economic conditions of the country. The memory in the song goes back about three decades to 1972. Yet, in an unintended fashion, the song also describes the death of the Bengali nineteenth century as well. For this century, it would appear, had quietly left its mark on the reading habits of the fictitious Mr. Ananda Sen. Browning and Tennyson were, after all, two of the most popular poets among Bengali readers of English literature in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The long Bengali nineteenth century is perhaps finally dying. It may therefore make sense to treat its death as a proper object of historical study. In the context of the remarks made by my friend whose sentiments made me think of the subject of this essay, I want to ask: What was the nature of the *bhadralok* investment in literature and language that once made these into the means of feeling one's Bengaliness? Here it is useful to pay some attention to the works of Dinesh Chandra Sen, the pioneering historian and a lifelong devotee of Bengali literature.⁴ Once hailed as the foremost historian of Bengali literature, he was lampooned by a younger generation of intellectuals

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3. Chandrabindu, "Ananda Sen," *Gadha*, audiocassette, 2001.
 4. Bengalis did not have second names until the coming of the British. During colonial rule, Bengali men began to split names made up of compoundwords in order to produce middle names. Thus Dineshchandra became Dinesh Chandra. I will simply follow this custom in spelling the name of Sen even in passages translated from Bengali. My focus on Sen also necessarily limits the aspects of Bengali literature I deal with here.

in the 1930s who faulted his sense of both politics and history. It is the story of the early reception and the later rejection of Sen's work that I want to use here as a way to think about the questions raised by my friend.

A few biographical details are in order. Born in a village in the district of Dhaka in 1866, Dinesh Chandra Sen (or Dinesh Sen for short) graduated from the University of Calcutta with honors in English literature in 1889 and was appointed the headmaster of Comilla Victoria School in 1891 in Comilla, Bangladesh. While working there, he started scouring parts of the countryside in eastern Bengal in search of old Bengali manuscripts. The research and publications resulting from his efforts led to his connections with Ashutosh Mukherjee, the famed educator of Bengal and twice the vice chancellor of the University of Calcutta (1906–1914 and 1921–23). In 1909, Mukherjee appointed Sen to a readership and subsequently to a research fellowship in Bengali at the university.⁵ Sen was eventually chosen to head up the postgraduate department of Bengali at the University of Calcutta when that department—perhaps the first such department devoted to postgraduate teaching of a modern Indian language—was founded in 1919. Sen served in this position until 1932. He died in Calcutta in 1939. Sen produced two very large books on the history of Bengali literature : *Bangabhasha o shahitya* (Bengali Language and Literature) in Bengali, first published in 1896, and *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (in English), based on a series of lectures delivered at the University of Calcutta and published in 1911.⁶ He also

5. See Supriya Sen, *Dineshchandra* (Calcutta, 1985), p. 39.

6. For a factual revision of Dinesh Sen's research findings, see the appendices added by Prabodh Chandra Bagchi and Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay to Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bangabhasha o shahitya*, ed. Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1991), 2:868–89.

produced many other books including an autobiography. All his life, Sen remained a devoted, tireless researcher of Bengali language and literature.⁷

Sen, today, is truly a man of the past. His almost exclusive identification of Bengali literature with the Hindu heritage, his idealization of many patriarchal and Brahmanical precepts, and his search for a pure Bengali essence bereft of all foreign influence will today arouse the legitimate ire of contemporary critics. It is not my purpose to discuss Sen as a person. But, for the sake of the record, it should be noted that, like many other intellectuals of his time, Sen was a complex and contradictory human being. This ardently and (by his own admission) provincial Bengali man loved many English poets and kept a day's fast to express his grief on hearing about the death of Tennyson.⁸ For all his commitment to his own Hindu-Bengali identity, he remained one of the foremost patrons of the Muslim-Bengali poet Jasimuddin.⁹ The inclusion of a poem by Jasimuddin in the selection of texts for the matriculation examination in Bengali in 1929, when Hindu-Muslim relations were heading for a

7. Biographical details on Dinesh Sen are culled here from his autobiography, *Gharer katha o jugashahitya* (1922; Calcutta, 1969); Supriya Sen, *Dineshchandra*; biographical note entitled "The Author's Biography" published in Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bangabhasha o shahitya*, 1:43–45; and "The Author's Life," in Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Banglar puronari* (Calcutta, 1939), pp. 1–32. A later reprint of this book (1983) says in a publisher's note that this short biography given in the first edition contains some factual errors. But the facts stated here seem to stand corroborated by other sources.

8. See Supriya Sen, *Dineshchandra*, p. 19.

9. Sen's relationship to Jasimuddin is the subject of the latter's reminiscence in *Smaraner sharani bahi* (Calcutta, 1976). Jasimuddin writes:

Here was a man who took me from one station in life to another. My student life perhaps would have ended with

new low in Bengal, was directly due to Sen's intervention at the appropriate levels.¹⁰ And his patriarchal sense of the extended family did not stop him from encouraging his daughters-in-law to pursue higher studies.¹¹

2. Romanticism and the Project for a National Literature

What once made the word *Bengali* more than a mere ethnic tag and gave it a seductive ring for many was the phenomenon of a romantic, anticolonial nationalism in Bengal that flourished in the period c.1890–1910.¹² Its high point was the so-called *Swadeshi* (*swadesh*: "one's native

Cont. 9.

the I.A. [Intermediate of Arts] degree if I had not met him. Perhaps I would have spent my life as an ill-paid teacher in some village school. I think of this not just only once. I think this every day and every night and repeatedly offer my *pranam* [obeisance] to this great man. [P. 71]

10. Wahidul Alam writes:

I was surprised when in 1929 I read Jasimuddin's poem "Kabar" in Calcutta University's selection of Bengali texts for the Matriculation examination. A poem by a Muslim writer in the Matriculation selections! And that too under the auspices of the University of Calcutta? . . . A teacher of mine told me a story about this. There was forceful opposition in [the University's] Syndicate to the inclusion of a student. But Dr. Dinesh Sen was the number one advocate for Jasimuddin. . . . Apparently, he countered the opposition by saying, "All right, please be patient and just listen to me recite the poem." He had a passionate voice and could recite poetry well. He read the poem with such wonderful effect that the eyes of many members of the Syndicate were glistening with tears. (Wahidul Alam, "Kabi Jasimuddin," *Alakta* 5, no. 2 [1983]; quoted in Titash Chaudhuri, *Jasimuddin: Kabita, gadya o smriti* [Dhaka, 1993], p. 172).

11. See Sen, *Dineshchandra*, pp. 86–87.

12. *Romantic*, being a word of global provenance, is hard to define with respect to any particular national experience of romanticism. However, most Bengali romantics discussed here

land") movement (1905–8) organized to protest, and eventually reverse, the first partition of the province of Bengal executed by the British—ostensibly for administrative reasons—in 1905.¹³ At the center of this romanticism was a perceived connection between identity and aesthetic activity in the realms of art, music, literature, and language. Perhaps the best intellectual expression of this outlook—colored, as the following quote will show, by a heavy tint of early nineteenth-century German talk of the spirit—comes from the pen of Aurobindo Ghosh, a revolutionary leader of the Swadeshi movement who wrote this in 1909 :

The needs of our political and religious life are now vital and real forces and it is these needs which will reconstruct our society, recreate and re-mould our industrial and commercial life and found a new and victorious art, literature, science, and philosophy which will not be European but Indian. The impulse is already working in Bengali art and literature. The need of self-expression for the national spirit in politics suddenly brought back Bengali literature to its essential and eternal self and it was in our recent national songs that this self-realisation came. The lyric and the lyrical spirit, the spirit of simple, direct and

Cont. 12.

have shared with the Schlegel brothers the idea that "the truly Romantic" was constituted by "a certain radiance, or fluorescence, of the literary work which makes it transcend the necessarily limited scope of human language and open a vista into the infinite." Friedrich Schlegel's fragment that "'we should make poetry . . . sociable and society poetical'" would also have met with their enthusiastic approval (Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* [Cambridge, 1993], pp. 78, 157).

13. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (Delhi, 1973) is a rich account of the history of this movement.

poignant expression, of deep, passionate, straightforward emotion, of a frank and exalted enthusiasm, the dominant note of love and *bhakti* (sentimental devotionism), of a mingled sweetness and strength, the potent intellect dominated by the self-illuminated heart, amystical exaltation of feeling and spiritual insight expressing itself with plain concreteness and practicality—this is the soul of Bengal. All our literature, in order to be wholly alive, must start from this base and, whatever variations it may indulge in, never lose touch with it.¹⁴

It was sometime between 1872—when a scholar of Sanskrit, Ramgati Nyayaratna, published one of the first histories of Bengali literature—and 1896—when Dinesh Sen came out with *Bangabhasha o shahitya*—that this literary-ethical project of being Bengali itself came into being. A quick comparison between Nyayaratna's history of Bengali literature and that of Dinesh Sen is telling in this respect. Nyayaratna's book, *Bangalabhasha o bangalashahityavishayok prastav* (A Motion Concerning Bengali Literature and the Bengali Language) (1872) used the word *Bengali* simply to refer to an ethnic group. As Nyayaratna himself said in his preface to the first edition, the entire first chapter of the book was dedicated to solving problems with the dating of Bengali language and the script.¹⁵ The rest of the book did not in any way address the question of being Bengali. Sen's work, on the

14. Aurobindo Ghosh, "The Awakening Soul of India" (1909), in *On Nationalism*, ed. Sri Aurobindo, 2d ed. (Pondicherry, 1996), p. 404.

15. See Ramgati Nyayaratna, *Bangalabhasha o bangalashahityavishayok prastav*, ed. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay (1872; Calcutta, 1991), p. xv. This edition works on a later edition edited and published by Nyayaratna's son Girindranath Bandyopadhyay.

other hand, was all about the meaning of this question. Commenting on the difference between the two scholars, Dr. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, who edited a recent reprint of Nyayaratna's book, writes :

The goldmine of medieval Bengali literature was discovered by Dinesh Chandra Sen. ...His point of view was particularly different from that of Nyayaratna. ...Ramgati's mind had been moulded by the heritage of Sanskrit language and literature. ...For Dinesh Chandra was well acquainted with English literature of the Victorian period and had also read with attention histories of English, French, and German literatures. ... Educated Bengalis, who were searching for the roots of the distinctiveness and for pride in the Bengali way of life ... welcomed him as the true historian of Bengali literature.¹⁶

Indeed, the impact of the publication of *Bangabhasha o shahitya* is captured in what Rabindranath Tagore wrote in praise of the book when it went into the second edition: "Dineshbabu ["babu" is an honorific term in Bengali] surprised us all when the first edition of this book came out. We never knew that there was such an enormous affair called ancient Bengali literature. We got busy familiarizing ourselves with the stranger."¹⁷ A project for a national literature looked on literature as an expression of the national spirit. This national spirit was expected to act as an antidote to all the mundane interests that otherwise divided the Bengali people—the Hindus from the Muslims, the lower castes from the upper castes, and the elite from the masses. Literature, in that sense, was seen as innately political. The Bengali intellectual's faith

16. Ibid., pp. vi–vii.

17. Rabindranath Thakur [Tagore], "Bangabhasha o shahitya" (1902), in *Rabindrarachabali: Janmashatabarshik shongskoron*, 13 vols. (Calcutta, 1961), 13 : 806.

in the work of the spirit was articulated in what Aurobindo said in 1909 about the Italian patriot Mazzini — a veritable icon of romantic nationalism in India: “Mazzini lifted the country from [a] ... low and ineffective level and gave it the only force which can justify the hope of revival, the force of the spirit within, the strength to disregard immediate interests and surrounding circumstances. ... The spiritual force within not only creates the future but creates the material for the future.”¹⁸ A similar appreciation of the national spirit animated all that was said about literature in the 1890s and 1900s. Dinesh Sen treated the “folk” literature of Bengal as “expressions of all the poetry of the race.” They were “read and admired by millions — the illiterate masses forming by far the most devoted of their admirers.”¹⁹ In a lecture on “national literature” given at an annual meeting of the newly founded (1893) Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengali Literary Academy), Tagore put an ingenious gloss on the Sanskrit/Bengali word for *literature*, *sahitya*. “The word ‘sahitya,’” he said, is derived from the word “sahit” [being with]. Considered in its constitutional sense, then, the word suggests the idea of being together. This togetherness does not simply relate to thoughts, languages, or books. No deep intimacies between human beings, between the past and the present, or between the

18. Ghosh, “The Power That Uplifts” (1909), in *On Nationalism*, p. 456. Indian romantic political readings of Mazzini and the Italian Risorgimento would make a fascinating area of research. Gita Srivastava, *Mazzini and His Impact on the Indian Nationalist Movement* (Allahabad, 1982) makes an indifferent beginning. See also N. Gangulee, introduction to Giuseppe Mazzini, *Giuseppe Mazzini: Selected Writings* (London, 1944?), p. 38: “It was in [a] . . . study-group in Calcutta that I first came to read Mazzini’s writings.”

19. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta, 1911), p. 167; hereafter abbreviated *H*.

distant and the near can be forged by means other than those of literature. The people of a country lacking literature have no ties binding one another. They remain divided.²⁰

Sen's *History* actually offered some anecdotal evidence of this alleged spiritual bond between the educated elite and the nonliterate masses enabled by the shared pleasures of "folk" literature :

In 1894, I was residing in Tippera. It was early in June; the clouds had gathered on the horizon, and round the [S]ataratan Matha [monastery] of Comilla, they had made the darkness of night a shade more black. An illiterate Vaishnava [literally, of the god Vishnu] devotee, an old man of seventy, was singing the following song of Chandi Das [a medieval Bengali poet], playing on a lute made of a long gourd.

"Dark is the night and thick are the clouds,
How could you, my beloved, come by the path in such a night? . . . "

I suddenly heard his voice become choked with tears, and he could not proceed any more. On his coming to himself, ... I asked him the cause of his tears. He said, it was the song. . . . He did not consider the song as an ordinary love-song. Here is his interpretation, — "I am full of sins. ... In deep distress I beckoned Him to come to me. ... I found Him waiting at the gate of my house. It cannot be any pleasure to Him to come to a great sinner like me, — the path is so foul, but by my supreme good fortune the merciful God took it. ... The thought of His mercy choked my voice. ... "

Tears were dropping from the eyes of the old man ... as with his right hand he was still playing on the lute. [H, pp. 127–30]

20. Tagore, "Bangla jatiya sahitya (1895–96)," in *Rabindracharita*, 13:793.

Sen considered this an "instance of [the] spiritualization of ideas even by rural and illiterate people in Bengal" (*H*, p. 127). Sen's anecdote allows us an insight into the romantic-nationalist construction of the past. In what he wrote on folk and national literature in the period 1880–1910, Rabindranath Tagore theorized just such a past. He expressed the hope that Bengali literature would act as "the live umbilical cord" helping to bind together the past, the present, and the future of the Bengali people "in all their intensity and greatness."²¹ Such collapsing of different times would defy the logic of the historian. Tagore remarked once with respect to the literature of the rural "folk": "One or two hundred years do not make much difference to the age of these poems. Looked at from this point of view, rhymes put together by a village poet, say, fifty years ago may be seen as contemporaneous with the compositions of Mukundaram [sixteenth–seventeenth centuries]. For the waves of time cannot assault with any force the place where the soul of the village survives" (quoted in "CC," p. 57).²² Or as he put it elsewhere: "Fragments of many ancient histories and memories lie dispersed in these [rural nursery] rhymes. No archaeologist can put them together in order to make them into a whole. But our imagination [*kalpana*] can attempt to create out of these ruins a distant-and-yet-close relationship with that forgotten and ancient world" (quoted in "CC," p. 57).²³

If literature was indeed so inherently political, one can then look on Sen's passionate wanderings in the Bengal

21. Tagore, "Jatiya shahitya" (1895–96); quoted in Gautam Bhadra and Deepa Dey, "Chintar Chalchitra: Bangiya Shahitya Parishat (1300–1330)," *Sahitya Patrika* 38 (1994–95): 47; hereafter abbreviated "CC."

22. See Tagore, "Gramyo sahitya," in *Rabindrarachabali*, 6 : 642.

23. See Tagore, "Chhele bhulano chhora," in *Rabindrarachabali*, 6:585.

countryside around Chittagong and Tripura in his twenties—looking for old manuscripts—as a variety of romantic-political activism. His narrative highlights the spirit of sacrifice that Aurobindo spoke of in his praise for Mazzini. On occasions, Sen seems to have received support from interested officials who sent their liveried assistants along to help him. But often the search was lonely, all his own, at his own expense, and at great risk to his health and safety. In Sen's own words :

The sight of liveried government orderlies or peons would frighten villagers. [The presence of] such personnel in fact hindered the collection of manuscripts, so I would [often] go alone. Sometimes I would be travelling in the hills until nightfall. At times I would simply have to summon up ... courage and trek through rain and storm or through terrifying jungles at night. ...Only a person as wretched as I would go around collecting manuscripts in this manner, abandoning all hopes for living. How often I would be hurt from all the travelling I did and would cry [from pain] if I touched the wounded part of my body.²⁴

3. Colonial Romantics and Their Anxieties

Sen's work makes visible two major—and related— anxieties that drove the romantic-political project of a national literature. The first, as we have seen, was the concern to find a spiritual ground on which to erect national unity.²⁵ This quest for unity made it necessary to

24. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Gharer katha o jugashahitya*, pp. 124–25.

25. This indeed was one of the reasons Tagore welcomed *Bangabhasha o shahitya*. Sen's book had "brought to life" the true history of Hindu–Muslim relationship by showing that "a close relationship existed between Hindus and Muslims, that there was a path of friendship between them in spite of

use literary material to create a family romance of the nation. That romance, in turn, was deeply marked by some other male anxieties concerning home, gender, and sexuality. This, as such, is not surprising. Feminist historians have often documented such anxieties for nationalisms generally, both in India and elsewhere.²⁶ What is interesting about this particular story, however, is what Sen's writings tell us about the reception of European romanticism in the Bengal of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As historians of modern Bengali literature well know, poets such as Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth—as well as Milton (introducing a note of classicism) and Shakespeare—were enduring icons in the worlds of nineteenth-century Bengali poets.²⁷ I do not have the space here to discuss the topic in any detail. We know Michael

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many troubles and disturbances." This, Tagore added, was "truly historical, something that should always be made known. For this is the story of the land, it is not a fact concerning some specific people" (Tagore, "Bangabhasha o sahitya," *Rabindrarachabali*, 13:807).

26. See, for example, Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992); Carla Hesse, *The "Other" Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, N. J., 2001); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi, 2001); and Rochona Majumdar, "Marriage, Modernity, and Sources of the Self: Bengali Women c.1870–1956" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2003), esp. chap. 2, "Debates on Dowry in Colonial Bengal."
27. See Priyaranjan Sen, *Western Influence in Bengali Literature* (1932; Calcutta, 1966); Harendra Mohan Das Gupta, *Studies in Western Influence on Nineteenth-Century Bengali Poetry, 1857–1887* (1935; Calcutta, 1969); Ujjvalkumar Majumdar, *Bangla sahitye pashchatya probhab* (Calcutta, 2000); and Clinton Seely, *The Slaying of Meghnada: A Ramayana Revisioned in Colonial Calcutta* (forthcoming).

Madhusudan Datta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, and Biharilal Chakrabarty—important names in nineteenth-century history—were influenced and inspired by these poets.²⁸ This history awaits detailed research, but anecdotal evidence suggests that well into the early part of the twentieth century Bengali poets remained enthusiasts of English romantic and classicist poetry. The following description of a literary exchange between the romantic nationalist poet Dwijendralal Roy (1863–1913) and his friend Lokendranath Palit, a well-known and colorful personality of the day, could be considered typical:

Loken has an amazing and unending capacity to understand poetry! He understands Byron without any effort. Shelley he is even more at ease with. The other day I had a big argument with him about Byron and Shelley. I started reading out from *Manfred*. Listening to it, he suddenly jumped out of his chair with sheer enthusiasm and said, “*Oh, maddening!* [in English in original] No more, no more, please don’t read any more. Let me think.” Saying this, he remained self-absorbed in a serious mood for about a quarter [of an hour]. What a connoisseur he is! You

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28. That the young Michael often modeled not only his writings but even his personal letters in the 1840s on those of Byron has been noted by a couple of recent commentators. See Ghulam Murshid, *Ashar chhalane bhuli: Michael-jibani* (1995; Calcutta, 1997), pp. 55–56. Murshid credits William Radice of the University of London with having been the first to notice similarities between Byron’s letters published in Thomas Moore’s life of the poet and those written by the young Michael; see p. 9. The other poets mentioned here often simply inserted lines translated from English romantic poets into what they wrote in Bengali.

cannot compare him with the likes of us. A Bengali man gets all excited if he can rhyme three lines using words like “*mondo* [gentle], *mondo*, *shugondho* [fragrance]” and thinks to himself: “What a poet I have become!” ... Good writing requires ... truly good education.... Shelley, Byron, Keats, Shakespeare, our Vaishnava poets, Vyas [the mythical writer of the *Mahabharata*], Valmiki [the mythical writer of the *Ramayana*], Kalidas, Hugo—unless you read these great poets with sincere devotion you cannot any longer become a great poet by dint of any magical “*abracadabra*,” not today.²⁹

Dinesh Sen came from the same cultural stock as Dwijendralal Roy. His enthusiasm for Scott, Milton, Tennyson, and for the Lake poets is well known; he could even recite some of their poetry from memory.³⁰ I have not had the opportunity to investigate in more detail Sen’s reading practices. But references to the heroines of Byron, Shakespeare, and others in some critical passages in his *History of Bengali Language and Literature* allow us to see how an intimate, yet troubled, relationship to European romanticism determined the nature of Sen’s pursuit of the folk. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Sen’s *History* in which he is seeking to argue with his own English-educated Bengali readers as to why they should not seek their ideals of romantic love in European poetry. They should instead look in the direction of Behula, Khullana, and Ranjavati—all heroines from the so-called middle period who were to become household names thanks, in large part, to Sen’s own writings:

29. Quoted in Debkumar Raychaudhuri, *Dwijendralal: Jibon* (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 404–5.

30. See “The Author’s Life,” in Sen, *Banglar puronari*, p. 14.

The enlightened section of our community who are fond of displaying their erudition in English literature, who are never weary of admiring a Cordelia, a Haidee or even a Donna Julia and who quote from the English translation of Virgil to shew their appreciation of Dido's love, would not care to read the story of Behula—the bride of Laksmindra, whose unflinching resolution and sufferings for love rise higher than many a martyrdom; or of Khullana, the loving damsel of Ujani, whose beauty, tender age, sufferings and fidelity all combine to make her one of the finest creations of poetic fancy; or of Ranjavati—the wife of King Kadna Sen of Maynagar whose resignation was as great as her austerities that stripped even death at the stake of its natural horrors. [*H*, pp. 397–98]

Cordelia, Haidee, Donna Julia: all names of heroines with strong imprints of individuality on their personalities. They were characters who made their own choices in matters of love, individuals—as a recent commentator on Byron has put it—“in possession of the means of erotic self-assertion.”³¹ Besides, Donna Julia and Haidee were even portrayed as proactive seducers of Don Juan in Byron's long poem of the same name, as part of the politics of what, to quote a contemporary critic, “Coleridge might have called Byron's ‘sexual Jacobinism.’”³² For Byron, surely, sexual liberty was part of liberty as such and formed a core of his critique of

31. Charles Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy in Byron's “Don Juan”: A Marketable Vice* (London, 2000), p. 48. See also the discussion in chaps. 3 and 6.

32. The expression “sexual Jacobinism”—and the idea that this is how Coleridge might have described Byron's politics—come from Malcolm Kelsall, “Byron and the Romantic Heroine,” in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (New York, 1990), p. 57. Moyra Haslett, *Byron's “Don Juan” and the Don Juan Legend* (Oxford, 1997), p. 185, employs a very similar

emerging bourgeois domesticity in his own country.³³ It is important to note that Sen does not deny the appeal to Bengali men of sexually and politically "liberated" women. He indirectly documents that for the "modern," romantic, English educated Bengali man, European literature portrayed women who were exciting and attractive. Why, then, should Bengali men turn to their "own" folk literature that they, said Sen, were "naturally best fitted to appreciate"? Sen's argument, as it unfolds, expresses a fear of that which also seemed attractive. It was an argument that appears to have arisen from a sense of erotic, if not sexual, despair. Bengali men's "appreciation of the romantic motives of European literature," said Sen, was "fraught with disastrous results to our society." Why? Sen's answer did not in the least glorify actually existing Bengali families. These families, he wrote, left "no room for the betrothed pair to have the slightest share in the mutual choice" (*H*, p. 398). Sen's romantic critique of Bengali domestic arrangements takes an even more searing form in a few other sentences in his *History*. "In this country," he said,

a blind Providence joins the hands of a mute pair who promise fidelity, often without knowing each other. When the situation grows monotonous, losing colour and poetry, both men and women are treated to lectures on the purity of the nuptial vow, and to promises of rewards in the next world. They fully believe in the sanctity of marriage, and are ready to sacrifice sentiment to stern duty. But human passion

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expression. The comments are inspired by, among other things, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask (London, 1997), chap. 23.

33. See, in particular, Haslett, *Byron's "Don Juan" and the Don Juan Legend*, chaps. 1-3, 5.

cannot be altogether repressed, and where it overrides the ordinances of the Shastras [scriptures], it rushes forward with extraordinary strength, all the greater for the attempt at forcible suppression. [*H*, p. 117]

This was *not* the language of a conservative believer in tradition. We now begin to see Sen's predicament, and clearly it was not his alone. Byron was exciting, but Sen was scared of the consequences of his sexual politics. European romanticism had given rise—among Bengali men—to a critique of the Bengali home and its conjugal arrangements. Part of this critique was indeed a desire for “liberated” women, which Sen had taken to heart. However, like many of his contemporaries, Sen feared that the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual in domestic and conjugal life could only make men profoundly unhappy in a land where the bonds of the extended family with its own long history seemed indissoluble. This is one of the few places in the book where Sen admits both his despair as a romantic individual and the practical utility—from a pragmatic point of view—of the ideal of self-sacrifice that he found elaborated in Bengali literature. That is why his idealization of the Bengali family—his family romance that underpinned the “national literature” project—ultimately rests on an impulse that is far from romantic. For he says, quite plainly: “Indeed, in a place where a joint and undivided family system required a man to live and eat together with all his near kinsmen, it would be impossible to live in harmony without elevating the domestic duties into the highest virtues” (*H*, p. 879). This was not a spiritual defence of the arrangements that *actually existed* within Bengali homes. It was more a desperate search for a romanticized “tradition” that would make room for the new individual, both male and

female, while allowing the pursuit of happiness in a land in which the past did nothing to validate the European-humanist ideal of the individual. For Sen and his cohorts the only solution seemed to be a romanticized notion of the extended family itself. It would be harmonious enough to accommodate within its regime the companionate form of marriage, and yet it would tame any potential for mixing sexual liberty with political liberty. Such a family would act as a metaphor for the nation. Without families of this kind, as Sen put it, "it would be impossible to live in harmony." His talk of "elevating the domestic duties into the highest virtues" was actually making a virtue out of perceived necessity (*H*, p. 879).

In Bengali literature, Sen reasoned, the "virtue" of domestic duty had been preached for generations. This literature—and not the existing arrangements in the family—seemed to offer spiritual solutions to what ailed the spirit of the English-educated, romantic Bengali man. Sen writes: "No other nation has ever given so high a value to domestic duties, identifying them so closely with the spiritual" (*H*, p. 879). It was literature—its folk, medieval, and Vaishnava traditions, and the translated Puranas in particular—that had supplied "inexhaustible examples" of "obedience to parents, loyalty to the husband, devotion to brothers and sacrifices to be undergone for guests, servants and relations" (*H*, p. 878). In fairness to Sen, it must be said that he did not preach patriarchal values—the examples of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Shakuntala, and Behula—only to women. He preached to all, both men and women, ideas of a harmonious system of hierarchy and of voluntary and willing submission to authority facilitated by the feeling of devotion (*bhakti*) to duty. "Rama who left the throne ..., and Visma, who took the vow of celibacy,... Hanumana [who] typif[ied] devotion to a master, and Ekalavya to

the religious preceptor" were the ideal characters he held up to his male readers (*H*, p. 879).

With hindsight, we know that the fear that Sen and his contemporaries had of "unbridled" individualism in conjugal life destroying the social fabric of the extended family overstated reality. But that is the wisdom of hindsight. What we have to notice is that the desire for harmony in the extended family and in national life in general may itself have been a modern ideal that developed only after the coming of British rule. Pre-British Bengali literature surely does not fight shy of conflict between family members, nor does it preach any general message of harmony. The ideas that allowed many to see the caste system, the patriarchal extended family, the village, and other collectivities as potentially harmonious entities owed themselves, I suspect, to European education. To press into the service of domestic harmony the "virtue" of self-sacrifice and loyalty to one's social superiors was a modern development. While it battled what it saw as Western individualism it was itself most likely a product of the romanticism and classicism that came with the West.

4. From the Ruins of "National Literature"

The romantic project of a "Bengali national literature" came apart in the 1920s and 1930s as demand for a separate Muslim homeland gained momentum in the subcontinent as a whole. The politics of Bengal now got drawn into the politics of the rest of India. Besides, women, the working classes, and the lower castes all increasingly asserted themselves in political and public life using the language of rights. Literature alone could not produce the "national spirit" anymore. That the formation of a Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengal Literary Academy) in 1893 did not address the needs of Bengali-Muslims became clear from early in the second decade

of the twentieth century. A near-absolute breach between Hindu and Muslim intellectuals took a long time to develop. But as early as 1911 Muslim intellectuals in Calcutta set up a separate Muslim Literary Association (Muslim Sahitya Samiti) as they found the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad too Hindu for their taste. The renowned linguist Muhammad Shahidullah, who was one of the organizers of the new association, thus remembered the circumstances leading to its formation. His prose clearly speaks of Muslim and Hindu Bengalis as "us" and "them":

I passed the B.A. examination in 1910. I came in contact with several enthusiastic young men at that time. Among them were Mohammed Mozammel Huq, Mohammad Yakooob Ali Chaudhuri, Maulvi Ahmad Ali, Muoinuddin Hussain, and others. ... Some of us were members of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. There was no discrimination made there between Hindus and Muslims. Yet our literature was so poor that taking part in their meetings made us feel like the way the poor feel inside the houses of their wealthy relatives. We felt wanting in spirit. We thought we should have our own literary association without cutting of relations with the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. With this purpose in mind, a meeting was convened on 4th September 1911 at No. 9, Anthony Bagan Lane, Calcutta, at the house of Maulvi Abdul Rahman Khan. ...I was unanimously elected the secretary.³⁴

34. Muhammad Shahidullah, "Bangiya muslim sahitya patrika," in *Shahidullah rachanabali*, ed. Anisuzzaman, 4 vols. (Dhaka, 1994), 1:471. For more details on this event and on later developments, see Khondkar Siraj ul-Huq, *Muslim sahitya samaj: Samajchinta o sahityakarma* (Dhaka, 1984), pp. 93–177.

The formation of the University of Dhaka in 1921 gave a further boost to Muslim literary activities and aspirations. Besides, constitutional reforms initiated between 1919 and 1935 by the colonial government introduced limited but critical forms of electoral politics that only deepened and intensified the competitive currents between Hindus and Muslims and between the upper castes and the so-called "Depressed classes."³⁵ During this period the Indian National Congress became a "mass" political organization under the leadership of Gandhi, and the Muslim League found "mass" political methods for pressing home the demand for Pakistan. Politics itself was no longer—except in the idealist proclamations of Gandhi and Gandhians—about transcending interest. It became more a calculus of creating "general" interests around class, caste, religious, or "secular-Indian" communities. Attributed more to interest than to spirit or virtue, politics would increasingly come to be seen as arising not from "spirit" but from the dynamic of the social structure. This was a dynamic that emergent new disciplines of the social sciences were far more suited to study and address than art or literature. One could politicize literature, distinguish political from so called nonpolitical literature, or read literature politically in the interest of social justice. But that was different from literature itself being by definition a fount of the political. The rational procedures of the social sciences now seemed much better suited to address national-political needs. It is not surprising that Dinesh Sen's works should lose their charm for many younger Bengali intellectuals in this period. To them, Sen seemed like an intellectual dinosaur, representing increasingly obsolete methods and assumptions of research in

35. See Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi, 1999).

reconstructing the past of the Bengali people. More than that, he seemed out of step with the moves the main nationalist party, the Indian National Congress, had taken. Sen's politics of projecting a "national Bengali identity" now sounded to some as a special plea for a Bengal that excluded from its territory other Indians who did not speak Bangla. His position would thus be seen by some as opposed to the ideals of a pan-Indian nationalism with which the Congress increasingly confronted the Muslim demand for a separate homeland. The linguist Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay strongly criticized the idea of "Greater Bengal," an expression that Sen used as the title of his last book. "We cannot afford to forget," said Chattopadhyay, "that the land of Bengal is part of India; that Bengalis are part of a cluster of Indian nationalities and have no other identity separate from India." "Bengali culture," he said, himself forgetting the Bengali Muslim, "is part of Indian culture—there is no Bengali culture opposed to the latter."³⁶

Perhaps the most severe criticisms of Sen came in the columns of a Calcutta-based journal started in 1924, *Shanibarar chithi* (Saturday's Mail), devoted to humorous, witty, but often hurtful criticisms of writers and literary

36. Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, "Brihattara banga," *Bharat-sanskriti* (Calcutta, 1939), pp. 155–75. This essay was dropped from the second edition of the book. Thanks to Gautam Bhadra for bringing this essay to my attention. The same criticism was made (probably by the same author) in an unsigned essay entitled "Itihash noy" (Not History) that ridiculed Sen's *Brihat banga*. See Anon., "Itihash noy," *Shanibarar chithi* (Aug.–Sept. 1936): 1301–15. Bengali Muslim nationalism that repudiated both Hindu-Bengali nationalism and any idea of a larger "Indian nationalism" eventually gave the lie to Chattopadhyay's contention as well.

fashions.³⁷ The poet Jasimuddin in his reminiscences of Sen in this period captures with sympathy and compassion the extent of Sen's marginalization and his harassment at the hands of young and irreverent researchers.³⁸

Around 1928–29 and 1936–37, the journal published several articles virulently criticizing Sen, including a long essay published in installments and sarcastically entitled—in mock-Persian—*Dineshnama* or the “The Tale of Dinesh.” These essays and reviews sometimes acknowledged the pioneering role that Sen had played as a historian of Bengal. But they made fun of his many factual errors, faulty argumentation, his tendency to go on publishing new editions of *Bangabhasha o shahitya* without familiarizing himself with recent research, and, above all, the obsolete sentimentalism of his method. The accusations amounted to the charge—and the *Chithi* said it literally in some of its issues—that what Sen had written was not objective and scientific history; it was more like imaginative literature. Sen's book *Brihat banga* (Greater Bengal), they asserted (not altogether unreasonably), was not history but “a novel.”³⁹

37. An informative account of the history of this journal is provided in Shonamoni Chakraborty, *“Shanibarar chithi” o adhunik bangla sahitya* (Calcutta, 1992).

38. Jasimuddin mentions Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay among the leaders of the group oppose to Sen. See Jasimuddin, *Smaraner sharani bahi*, pp. 61, 68. For a recent critical appreciation of *Brihat banga*, see Gautam Bhadra, “Itihashe smritite itihash,” *Visva-Bharati patrika* (July–Sept. 1994): 134–43.

39. See the following entries: “Dineshnama” (The Tale of Dinesh), “Bangabhasha o sahitya,” *Shanibarar chithi* (Mar.–Apr. 1929): 142–80, 214–26, and “Dineshnama” and letter by Bhimrul Sharma, *Shanibarar chithi* (Apr.–May 1929): 312–36, and (May–June 1929): 440–44. These essays described Sen as a “flatterer”

The language of criticism in *Shanibarar chithi* was often harsh and sometimes vicious.⁴⁰ But the charges stuck and were repeated by others. Nalinikanta Bhattachali, a respected historian of Bengali literature, acknowledged the value of Dinesh Sen's pioneering work in his introduction to a 1936 edition of the Bengali *Ramayana*. But that was about the only praise that Bhattachali could offer Sen. "The gap," he added,

between histories of literature written at the time of the first publication of *Bangabhasha o sahitya* and those written now is as large as the gap between the year 1837 in the reign of Victoria and 1901. ... *Bangabhasha o sahitya* is now in its sixth edition. It is true that Dineshbabu has attempted to mend [the book] clumsily—and within the limits of his knowledge and intelligence—by adding some recent findings here and there. But the structure of the book has not changed and it has, as a whole, acquired an

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of powerful people at the university while also being a "tyrant" to his subordinates. His "histories" were termed fables and his autobiography mocked. The letter from Sharma described Sen as "moon-struck" and pointed to several factual errors in his books. Among the other issues of *Shanibarar chithi* that targeted Dinesh Sen were (Oct.–Nov. 1928): 826; (Dec. 1928–Jan. 1929): 994–1004; (Feb.–Mar. 1929): 998–1004; (Apr.–May 1936): 1002, 1022–23, 1143–44; (June–July 1936): 1128–31; (Aug.–Sept. 1936): 1301–15, 1338–42; (Sept.–Oct. 1936): 1612–13; and (Nov.–Dec. 1936): 192–93. *Shanibarar chithi* used to be dated according to the Bengali calendar. I have converted the months and years into those of the English calendar.

40. The essay on *Brihat banga*, for instance, indicated the "thickness" of Sen's head by suggesting that it be used as a nutcracker. Some of the articles referred to in note 39 accused him of stealing other people's research and of committing academic fraud.

appearance as terrible as that of the patchwork quilt of a *fakir*.

Bhattachali's colorful prose did not stop there:

Dineshbabu blithely ignores the majority of researchers and their research of the last thirty years. He does not discuss if he has read them, discussed them, or why he considers them unacceptable. Without including any of these [discussions] in the book, Dineshbabu simply tows along this worn-out, sluggish boat of his—filled with goods whose time has expired—from the station [in English in original] of one edition to another! Such a strange phenomenon can happen only in a lifeless country like ours.⁴¹

5. A Question of Method

Let us put aside for the moment the harshness of the criticism that Sen faced.⁴² Bengali intellectuals are, after all, no strangers to vicious criticism. Let me at the same time ignore the lack of wisdom in Sen's indefensible refusal to update research and methods and in his tendency towards sentimentalism. Nor do I want to

41. Nalinikanta Bhattachali, introduction to *Mahakabi krittibasrachita ramayan*, ed. Bhattachali (Dhaka, 1936), pp. i–viii. I owe this reference to Gautam Bhadra.

42. For the sake of record, I should mention that Sajanikanta Das, the founding editor of *Shanibarar chithi*, later repented his action in print. His posthumously published book, *Bangla gadtashityer itihash* (History of Bengali Prose) (Calcutta, 1975), says in its dedication: "Once, driven by the frivolity of youth, I wrote 'Dineshnama' in *Shanibarar chithi*. Not only did the generous-hearted Dinesh Chandra forgive me in his old age, he even blessed me from his heart. Sadly, I could not make amends when he was alive. I do so now." Thanks to Gautam Bhadra for this reference.

pursue here the point that Muslim nationalists never fully identified with the Hindu-romantic project. I want to focus instead on a question about method that the criticism of Sen, in effect, raised. It seems to me that what was at issue in this story was an important question about what constituted the archives for collective pasts and how such archives could be accessed. For those who, like Sen and others of his generation, had seen literature as quintessentially political, the past was constituted, ultimately, not merely by historical evidence but also by emotional and experiential recollections of the past. The past in that sense could fuse with the present. It was inhabitable in spirit. Sentiments and emotions were thus a part of the method of both constituting and accessing a collective past.⁴³ For the generation that painstakingly built up the principles of "scientific" history and dispassionate analysis, however, the archives lay in pieces of objective evidence coming down from the past. One's subjective feelings were merely personal. I am not suggesting that this change happened in a day. Nor do I mean to say that "objective" history writing did not have its own share of romances. I am simply drawing a contrast between two different modes of constituting and

43. Scholars who have continued in Sen's footsteps have never felt embarrassed about treating literature sentimentally. See, for instance, Shankariprasad Bosu, *Chjandidas o bidyapati* (1960; Calcutta, 1999), p. 28 :

It was in his heart, and not his head, that our teacher Dinesh Chandra received the inspiration for writing a history of literature. So the history he wrote was marked by a certain indispensable element of sentimentalism. What looks like uncontrolled sentimentalism from one point of view, sounds like a song [celebrating] the surrender of the self when approached from another. In entering the world of Chandidas's life, I will respectfully follow my predecessor Dinesh Chandra.

accessing the past in order to highlight a point in my argument.

That sentiments were a part of the romantic method Sen employed in constituting the past can be demonstrated easily with reference to the problem known as the Chandidas puzzle in the history of Bengali literature. For a long time, the name Chandidas was known among students and other readers of “medieval” Bengali literature. It was known from the biographies of the popular .fteenth- and sixteenth-century Bengali religious saint Chaitanya that he loved listening to song-poems composed by a Chandidas. The discovery of new texts in the second decade of the twentieth century, however, and a growing appreciation of historical methods of research produced a problem for historians of Bengali literature. It began to look likely that there had been many different poets who signed of their compositions with the same name of Chandidas (with different prefixes). Their proper identification, therefore, called for historical circumspection and careful collection and reading of evidence. Manindramohan Bose, a lecturer at the University of Calcutta, posed the problem in a series of essays published in the journal of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad around 1925 or 1926, pointing out ways in which some aspects of this puzzle could be solved by attending to particular aspects of the evidence.⁴⁴

Sen refused to see the problem in historical terms. It was not that he was intellectually incapable of appreciating the methodological issues under discussion. In endorsing the first volume of Bose’s edition of the poems of Deena Chandidas (one of the Chandidas), Sen

44. See Manindramohan Bose, introduction, *Deena chandidaser padabali*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1938), 2 : 9. See also the chapter called “Chandidas shamashya” in Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bangla sahityer katha : Madh yajug*, 3 vols. (Dhaka, 1966), 2:40–68.

referred approvingly to "the famous historian at the University of London, Professor L. D. Barnett" who allegedly advised "students to exercise skepticism in historical discussions" so that they did not accept any existing conclusions without proper examination. Skepticism, and not sentimentalism, said Sen, was central to "scientific research." "Writing guided by emotions and enthusiasm," Sen wrote almost echoing his critics, "may be poetic and attractive to the heart but it does not amount to scientific research." He commended Bose for following the path pointed out by Barnett.⁴⁵

Yet consider his own response in *Bangabhasha o shahitya* to the charge that the identity of any particular Chandidas needed to be established through careful research and that, by treating the different Chandidas as though they were one person, he had in fact distorted history. Sen retreated into a passage he had written in the very first edition of the book and dug his heels further into, as it were, the treacherous grounds of sentimentalism. In the very first edition (1896), he had said, with reference to Chandidas : "The reader will forgive me. The historian is meant to hide his own opinion in describing a subject. I am unable to follow that rule. ... I would not have discussed ancient Bengali literature if it had not been for the enchanting power of Chandidas's poems. Hence ... the many digressions."⁴⁶ In the second edition (1901) he made a few changes to this paragraph. After the sentence, "The reader will forgive me," he added: "Chandidas's poems have been the source of many a tear of joy and sorrow since my childhood. I cannot tell if the intense emotions of my heart will make it impossible for me to present a proper discussion of his

45. Quoted in Bose, "Opinions on the First Volume," *Deena chandidaser padabali*, 2:1-2.

46. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bangabhasha o shahitya*, 1:121.

poems."⁴⁷ The rest of the paragraph more or less remained the same. But faced in the 1920s with growing discussions of the need to deploy historical and linguistic methods of reasoning, particularly in relation to Chandidas, Sen made his de.ance of history ever more obstinate and willful. This particular paragraph was now expanded to incorporate the following: "For many years now I have recited the name of Chandidas as if it were the Gayatrimantra [a mantra Brahmins are expected to recite every day]. No one, not even my wife and sons, are as close to me as this great poet. Nobody in the world has given me more pleasure than he. From this acquaintance cultivated over half a century, I can now tell if a poem bears his [characteristic] 'tune.'" And then came the final antihistoricist declaration: "I have no desire to undertake linguistic analysis and solve the Chandidas-puzzle by distinguishing between the 'real' Chandidas, Boru Chandidas, Dvija Chandidas, the Chandidas who worshipped [the goddess] Bashuli, or the Chandidas who loved a young woman. To me, there is only one Chandidas and one alone."⁴⁸

Again, overlooking for now the stridency of Sen's tone, it seems clear that sentiments or emotions were quite central to Sen's method of constituting the past. The past had to be made palpably present.⁴⁹ This is precisely what

47. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bangabhasha o shahitya*, 2d ed. (Calcutta, 1901), pp. 186–87.

48. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bangabhasha o shahitya*, 6th ed. (Calcutta [?], 1926[?]), pp. 213–14.

49. There seems to be an interesting overlap—or maybe a homology—between this romantic way of collapsing the analytical distance between the past and the present and what is sometimes observed in studies of religious practices. I have in mind Carolyn Dinshaw's stimulating discussion of "queer history"—"where past and present collapse in a now" connecting lives that are only "queerly co-extensive."

would be resisted by the new science of history. It was not that the historian was not allowed any sentiments, but these could not be part of his or her method. If social-scientific rationality was what was political, then the nonrational could only be part of the personal. It could have a public life, but not as part of one's method. This is best shown by contrasting Sen's methods of approaching the past to those of the younger historian Niharranjan Ray. Ray's magnum opus *Bangalir itihash : Adiparba* (A History of the Bengali People: The First Phase), first published in 1949, is now considered a classic. As an individual, Ray appears to have been as romantic a person as Sen. Indeed, in explaining the genesis of his book, he writes a paragraph (in the preface) that is strongly reminiscent of a certain passage in Dinesh Sen's autobiography. It begins on this note: "Whatever the amount of study, observation, reflection, discussion and research that has gone into this book, it was not a quest for knowledge that led me to write it." Ray continued:

The intoxicating, irrepressible and restless urges and the intense emotions of the vow of patriotism made me travel from one end of Bengal to the other in my early youth. In the peasant huts of this vast Bengal, at her river-ghats, in her paddyfields, in the shadow of her banyan trees, at the heart of her cities, on the sandbanks of the Padma, or on the crest of the waves of the Meghna—I saw a particular form of this country and its people and I loved it. ...It was the inspiration of this love that made me start writing this book. ... Ancient history is as true and alive for me as today's

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Dinshaw discusses the case of the medieval saint Margery Kempe who literally treated Jesus' death "as if he died this same day" (Carolyn Dinshaw, "Always Historicize? Margery Kempe Then and Now" [unpub. ms.], 2003).

present. It is that live and true past, and not just a dead skeleton, which I have sought to capture in this book.⁵⁰

A romantic nationalism thus propelled Ray just as much as it had Sen in their respective endeavors. They both saw in the beauty of the Bengal countryside the “home” of the Bengali spirit that romantics had celebrated in the songs and poems they wrote in the 1890s through the 1910s. Yet there was a profound difference between their methods. Sen’s sentiments, as I have said, were also part of his academic method. The two could not be separated. Niharranjan Ray, however, clearly separated them. What he said in the preface was no doubt a part of his motivation for doing the research he did, but it was not a proclaimed or conscious part of his method of analysis. Ray began his book explaining why Bengali histories written by his predecessors such as Haraprasad Shastri, Akshaykumar Maitreya, Rakhal Das Bandyopadhyay, Ramaprasad Chanda, and others did not quite amount to a “history of the Bengali people.” For a “true introduction” (*jathartho*

50. Niharranjan Ray, *Bangalir itihash: Adiparba* (1949; Calcutta, 1993), p. xix; hereafter abbreviated *BI*. The corresponding passage in Sen’s autobiography reads:

The sound of conch shells and bells every morning and evening, the sweet smell produced by burning of incense and sandalwood, the ever-emergent red colour of lotus flowers—it was as if they all filled up Bengal villages, their marketplaces, fields, ghats, and pathways, with an atmosphere of devotion to God. I began to consider the dust of every village of my motherland sacred. This was nothing like the [new-fangled] emotion of nationalism or patriotism on my part. Nor was it a feeling produced by simply copying the English. Truly did every particle of dust of this land make my tears flow. An indescribable feeling of attraction made me fall in love with the land of Bengal. [Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Gharer katha o jugashahitya*, p. 120]

porichoy) to the history of the whole “way of life” of Bengalis needed the application of a properly “historical form of reasoning” (*itihasher jukti*) and a self-conscious framework of “cause and effect relationships” (*BI*, p. 5). Man was both a product and the creator, said Ray, of “state, society, religion, art, literature, science, economic organisation and so on” (*BI*, p. 5). Hence the key to the past could not be just a sentimental apprehension of it. Sentiments had to be replaced by a sociological and a secular-humanist sensibility insofar as methods were concerned. When he uses poetry to enliven his discussion—as at the end of the section discussing the “geographical destiny” (*bhougholik bhagyo*) of the Bengali people where he cites some lines by the poet Premendra Mitra—Ray takes care to distinguish between a historical fact and poetic fancy. Poetry lends flourish to his exposition, but it is not an inherent part of his method. “This geographical destiny [of the Bengali people],” writes Ray quoting Mitra, “has assumed a beautiful poetic form through the pen of a twentieth-century Bengali poet” (*BI*, p. 71). But the “beautiful poetic form” was still poetry and not a “fact.”

Ray’s prose was thus part of a group of writings that inaugurated the moment of social-scientific history in the historiography of Bengali identity. He himself showed an awareness of this. He writes :

From towards the last third of the nineteenth century, beginnings were made in some parts of Europe—in Austria and Germany in particular but to some degree in France as well—in the study of the history of social development from a scientific point of view. Consequently, scholars everywhere have accepted that the larger social arrangements of different countries at different times depend on the mode of production of wealth and its distribution. Varieties of

race, class, and social stratification grow up according to this mode. [*Bl*, p. 8]

Was this a mild statement of certain Marxist principles? Perhaps. But it was mild enough to be considered a general statement of a “scientific” approach to history by the doyen of Indian historians, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, no Marxist himself. Blessing the book with a foreword, Sir Jadunath made it clear that what made this book properly historical were its attention to evidence and its focus on change and evolution. He welcomed the idea of historical development that underlay the book and praised its “attempt to understand how the Bengali people have gradually evolved into the modern-day Bengalis.”⁵¹

Arguments about sociological laws, about evidence and objectivity, about crafting—but not experiencing—the past eventually won the day in Bengali debates about historical methods. Prabodhchandra Sen’s classic study of the history of Bengali historiography remarked that the sense of the past that informed Bengali nationalists until about the Swadeshi movement (1905) had a dreamlike quality to it. Those histories, said Sen, were inspired more by a “dream-filled” (*shvapnomoy*) vision of Bengal than a “truth-filled” (*satyamoy*) one.⁵² Dinesh Sen was seen as one of the major practitioners of this genre. Acknowledging his many qualities as a researcher, Prabodhchandra Sen found the following major fault in Sen’s method: “his litterateur-like proneness to being sentimental swamps the disinterested objectivity of the historian in many places.” On the other hand, he praised Niharranjan Ray for his capacity, precisely, to “free” his

51. Jadunath Sarkar, foreword to *Bl*, p. x.

52. Prabodhchandra Sen, *Banglar itihash-sadhana* (Calcutta, 1953–54), p. 132.

methodological objectivity from “the lure of the sentiment of patriotism and other feelings.”⁵³

In the end, Dinesh Sen conceded defeat. In 1935, a few years before his death, an old and retired Sen published two very large volumes entitled *Brihat banga* (Greater Bengal), a history of Bengali culture from its mythical beginnings and its alleged spread to far outside India. The book was badly received by the contemporary critical public in Bengal. Sen’s own preface to the book shows how apologetically he now offered his writing to his readers, aware that academic fashions had moved on. So had the politics of knowledge changed that called such fashions into being. He realized that the question of methods was a question of how one related to the larger world. He could see that the talk about “scientific” history bespoke a certain sense of cosmopolitanism — a sense that one was part of a global research community — that his older, once equally global and cosmopolitan but now-discredited, romantic methods could no longer evoke. “I am not a lover of the world,” he said now, “I remain hopelessly provincial.” “If that makes someone think that I am not suited to this age, that I am a [proverbial] frog-in-the-well left behind by the ever-increasing and ever-progressing [surge of] civilisation, then I will not protest for I am indeed that.” Sen was now forced to recognize the disciplinary distinction between literature and history. “I have spent my life with Bengali language and literature. I am unknown in the field of history,” he said. “[The new] professors [of history] will find fault with me at every step. ... Perhaps the language of this book is not that of the scientific, judicious, disinterested historian. ... This book, in particular, has not been written only with the

53. Ibid., pp. 88, 135. See also Shyamali Sur’s discussion of romantic, nationalist histories in her *Oitihashik chinta o jatiyotabaader unmesh: Bangla 1870–1912* (Calcutta, 2002), chap. 3.

historians in mind." The nation now was a profoundly unstable category in his prose. Notice, for instance, within the space of the same paragraph the figure of "the ordinary people of Bengal" that metamorphoses into "Hindus" — a minority among the Bengalis, even though Sen refers to them as the majority:

One of my aims is to arouse in the hearts of the ordinary people of Bengal a love for their own country. They will not be attracted to dry and arid research. ...European writers generally pass in silence over the play of the supernatural in accounts of Christ's birth. ... [But] they become overly scientific while discussing our history. ... This kind of research only hurts the sharp sensitivities of the mute majority of our common people. But it behooves the Hindu writer to keep in mind the way the Hindu people look on the Tulasi plant or the iron bangle on the hands [of the married woman]. Otherwise the educated will get cut off from the rest of the community.⁵⁴

6. Romantic Archives

I come to my final point. Archives, it seems to me, are politically constituted. Bengali literature, for someone like Sen, was a very special kind of archival resource with which to remake society. It had three characteristics. By self-consciously idealizing life, literature acted as a repository of time tested virtues and values and thus furnished material for the making of the self. Second, by its very nature it tended to be popular and therefore national if not always democratic. And, finally, it was different from the cold facts of the history recorded in official documents, stone inscriptions, and coins in that by appealing to a continuity

54. Dinesh Chandra Sen, preface, *Brihat banga* (1935; Calcutta, 1993), pp. 30–33.

of emotional experience it defeated any attempt at an objectivist separation of the past from the present. However, it was not Sen's personal will that made this stance powerful when he first wrote *Bangabhasha o shahitya*. It was the romantic nationalism of the day that gave validity to his position and made literary endeavor an intrinsic part of a national project. It was similarly a change in the understanding of what was innately political (that is, in the best national interest) about knowledge—the rationality of social-science procedures—that made Sen's method look quixotic, if not downright "lunatic" (as his critics said), in the twentieth century.

The romantic sentiments of the Swadeshi period—once political and later merely personal—continued to live on as poetry, as precisely the expression of deep but personal emotions. A host of poets who rose to prominence between 1900 and 1920—among them Kalidas Ray, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay, Kumudranjan Mallik, and later, of course, Jasimuddin—found in the countryside an eternal Bengal to celebrate in their poetry.⁵⁵ Quite a few poems of this genre found their way into our school texts. One abiding theme of this poetry was a haunting desire on the part of poets to return in their future lives to the land of Bengal. How commonplace this sentiment of return was may be judged from the opening lines of a popular love song of the 1940s: "In a hundred years, may you and I return to a home in this very land."⁵⁶ Poetry and songs thus remained critical

55. A discussion placing Jasimuddin's poetry in this context is to be found in Selima Khalek, *Jasimuddiner kabita : Alankar o chitraprakash* (Dhaka, 1993), chap. 1.

56. The song was written by Mohini Chaudhuri, a well-known songwriter of the period. The singer Juthika Roy recorded it to a tune composed by Kamal Dasgupta. See *Abismaraniya gitikar mohini chaudhuri*, ed. Pabitra Adhikari (Calcutta, 2000), p. 79.

to the transmission of romantic sentiments once forged in the workshop of nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A critical nodal moment in this history of transmission of certain kinds of sentiments remains Jibanananda Das's book *Rupasi Bangla* (Bengal the Beautiful), a collection of poems composed in the early 1930s and published posthumously in the mid-1950s. Clinton Seely's sensitive study of Jibanananda Das, *A Poet Apart*, helps us to see the connection between the literary movement and sentiments that Dinesh Sen stood for in the 1890s and the 1910s and the poems on the subject of Bengal written by Das in the 1930s. The poems of *Rupasi bangla* are famous for expressing the poet's desire to be (re)born in Bengal. This motif recurs through many of the sonnets: "When I return to the banks of the Dhansiri, to this Bengal, / Not as a man, perhaps, but as a *salik* bird or white hawk."⁵⁷ Notice how, in these lines, Bengal has a palpable presence. The poet could point to it as it were and say, "*this* Bengal." But where was *this* Bengal to which Das yearned to return? It surely was not the Bengal of the realistic or "scientific" historian or the geographer. "*This* Bengal" had the same kind of presence as Chandidas had for Dinesh Sen. In fact, the sense of Bengali history that marks these poems is in part the one that Dinesh Sen espoused. Further, research and interpretation of the kind pioneered by Sen had a critical role in fostering the imagination embedded in Das's poems. These poems are replete with references to "folk" stories of the kind Dinesh Sen collected and to the medieval *mangal kavyas*, in particular to *chandi mangal* and *manasa mangal*, literary texts devoted to celebrating the powers of the folk goddesses Chandi

57. Quoted in Seely, *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das (1899–1954)* (Cranbury, N.J., 1990), p. 92; hereafter abbreviated PA.

and Manasa. The characters Chand and Behula from these *kavyas* and stories of their journeys live in an intimate relationship to the poetic sentiments expressed in *Rupasi bangla*. Experience is indeed what fuses the past with the present into an eternal history. As Seely says: "Chand from Champa and Behula establish a community of experience [with the poet], for back then they had seen Bengal's beauty just as the poet sees it now" (PA, p. 93). A mythical sense of a continuous Bengali history helps Das to create a Bengali present. Seely writes :

Jibanananda also refers to historical and mytho-historical figures : Ballal Sen, a king of ancient Bengal; Rajaballabh, whose glory was destroyed by the Kirtinasa river; Arjuna, from the *Mahabharata* epic; the Buddha and Confucius; the renowned medieval Bengali poets Mukundaram, Chandidas, Ramprasad, and Rayagunakar (Bharat Chandra Ray); and the man in whose memory Jibanananda had written one of his first poems, "Deshabandhu" Chitta Ranjan Das. [PA, pp. 94-95]

However, this was, of course, not a simple return of the spirit of Dinesh Chandra Sen. If Das's sonnets recuperated and rehearsed some of the sentiments underlying Sen's description of Bengal's pasts, they also displaced them on to a new context. For Das's enunciation of these sentiments had none of the nationalist, programmatic, and optimistic fervor of Dinesh Sen's exposition. These poems also carried an acutely historical sense of a twentieth-century "crisis" in Bengali lives. It was as if by holding the historical and the nonhistorical together that Das could heal the wounds of the historical present. It also has to be noted that Das's sentiments remained personal. He never thought of this healing as a collective project :

When the evening breeze from the Aswathha tree
touches
the blue forests of Bengal,
I wander alone in the fields : it is as if the crisis in
Bengal's life
has ended today.⁵⁸

It is interesting, however, that despite Das having been described as "the most solitary poet" of Bengal, these poems, so distant from any properly historical or political sensibility, should, from time to time, enjoy a public-political life that Das himself never coveted. "Certain readers," writes Seely, "consider [*Bengal the Beautiful*] Jibanananda's most successful book. In 1971, during the Bangladesh liberation war, poems from this collection became viewed as expressions of the quintessential Bangladesh for which the Mukti Bahini ('freedom army') fought. Twice during the war's nine months, new editions of *Bengal the Beautiful* were published" (PA, p. 97).

We do not know how Das's Muslim readers in Bangladesh read these poems during their liberation war. Did they read into his poems the folklyet-Hindu literary allusions that filled them? Perhaps not. The return of Das may not have signalled the return of an interest in the Bengali literature of the so-called middle period. What, then, did return with Das in the 1970s, about forty years after these poems were written? An answer is suggested by an obscure poem by a not very well-known poet, Narayan Sarkar, who penned the following poem in Calcutta in the tumultuous sixties. The poem was published in 1973 in a Bengali collection of contemporary revolutionary poetry. It was entitled, echoing Das, "I Shall Return" and thus foretold a return of Jibanananda Das

58. Jibanananda Das, *Jibanananda Daser kabyagrantha* (Jibanananda Das's Books of Poetry), 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1981), 1:201.

himself to a political context very different from that of his own time. Sarkar himself named this context. He described his poem as voicing the desire of those who had been killed by police during the "recent [1964] food movement in [West] Bengal". Here is the poem:

I shall return again to this Bengal
 From the dark of sleep has called the Ichhamati [river]
 The soil is moist with our blood
 It is as if the Bhagirathi has drawn the outlines of a
 mother's kiss
 On the green, sad banks of Bengal wet from the waves
 of the Jalangi.

Return I shall.

When the smell of paddy
 Surrounds the taste of sun — and the Ichhamati
 The Bhagirathi
 The Jalangi
 Of March
 Wild with the offerings of life
 Call like some eternal friend in the darkness of sleep
 I shall return
 "Smitten by Bengal's rivers and fields."⁵⁹

A political presence of the poetry of *Rupasi bangla* speaks through the entire body of this poem. The title quotes from the famous sonnet by Das: "When I return to the banks of the Dhansiri, to this Bengal." The Jalangi is one of the rivers mentioned in this sonnet that describes Bengal as "moistened by the Jalangi River's waves." Expressions such as "the taste of sun" are strongly reminiscent of Das's poetic idiom. And the last sentence

59. Narayan Sarkar, "Abar ashiba phire," in *He swadesh agnimoy swadesh*, ed. Kamallesh Sen (Calcutta, 1973), p. 60.

of the poem is a direct quotation from the same sonnet in *Rupasi Bangla*: “When again I come, smitten by Bengal’s rivers and fields” (quoted in *PA*, p. 93). Note how a political moment—the liberation war in Bangladesh or the 1964 food movement in West Bengal—can bring back a romantic access to a collective past, for the sentiments expressed here are no longer merely personal. It is precisely through these sentiments that one inhabits a time that collapses the past and the present. It is true that in Sarkar’s poem there is no reference to characters from Dinesh Sen’s literary world, characters remembered in the lines of Das’s original sonnets. No talk here of Chand the merchant or of Behula the truly chaste and devoted wife of medieval Bengal. Bengal here is represented by the poetic names of her rivers—Jalangi, Bhagirathi, Ichhamati. The Bengali past itself combines with death in the image of a dark depth from where the rivers, now constituting some kind of primeval past, send forth their primeval call. That call does not belong to the past. It comes from the future, a future that at the same time is a return. The martyrs will return from an ancient darkness, the poet tells us, when they hear the call.

Bengali poetry thus, I suggest, acts as the place where a collective memory of a now-discredited romantic sense of the political—the sense that once enabled Dinesh Sen to look on his history of Bengali literature as a nationalist, that is, political, exercise—is archived. But, in likening this historical process of transmission of sentiments to the process of archiving, I do not mean to say that this archive is simply there in any objective sense for us to make use of it. It is, in that sense, not the archive the historian usually draws on in writing exact and accurate narratives of the past. Nor is it an archive in a metaphorical sense. Bengalis on both sides of the national divide unwittingly make a political archive of their romantic legacy only in the process of their involvement

in actual political struggles. Otherwise, the legacy is simply there, as printed words, as aesthetics, as historical monuments to Bengali romanticism, once alive but now dead and cold. In this mode, they can only be revived as merely one's personal sentiments. To proclaim an individual sentiment as something political would indeed be sentimentalism. It is only during "mass" political struggles—be it the freedom struggle in Bangladesh, the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, or the Swadeshi movement that desired but failed to mobilize the masses—that the legacy of the romantic moment of our fraught nationalism, mediated by a long line of Bengali poets, may come back to haunt our own political sentiments. When such haunting happens, our being-political can no longer be reduced to any one understanding of what it means to be political. Both romantic and social-science imaginations jostle in that space.

The legacy of romantic nationalism, however, cannot mean yet another quest for a Bengali identity. As I have tried to show, there never was a stable Bengali identity. A quest today for the Behulas and the Kalketus of yore can only come to grief. The question is: What politics can we reconstitute out of our romantic investment in the language? The politics I have in mind, however, is not programmatic. The making of a romantic literary legacy into a political archive is not something we can will into being. Romantic thoughts no longer furnish our analytical frameworks, but the inheritance of romanticism is built into the Bengali language. Our everyday and unavoidable transactions with the poetry of the language may thus be compared to a practice of vigilant waiting—waiting *actively* for the return of the moment of a political yield. This vigilant and active waiting can itself be political—listen to the romantic voice of a Bengali communist poet who captures its spirit :

This condition of life
 is not for the whole year—
 only the few months when it rains.
 The blazing fire of the dry wood
 will cook rice in no time.
 And
 whatever is there
 will come back into view
 sharp and clear.
 When the rains depart
 we will put out in the sun
 everything that is wet
 woodchips and all.
 Put out in the sun
 we shall
 even our hearts.⁶⁰

60. Shubhas Mukhopadhyay, "Rode Debo," *Shubhas Mukhopadhyayer srestha kobita* (Calcutta, 1976), pp. 116–17.

ENDURING IMAGES IN THE LABYRINTH OF TIME AND SPACE

BUDDHADEB DASGUPTA

For a long time now, our collective consciousness has been increasingly surrounded by surrogate images of life as the politician or the ad-man would have us see it. They are intrinsically dull. They do not excite us, inspire us or communicate meaningful experiences of life to us. They are created and seen more from the point of view of consumerism than as an expression of ideas from one who has the vision of a poet.

This trend is dangerous. Already meaningful images are being shunted to the sidelines while transparent or imitative ones have been force-paced onto a fast track. These are more acceptable now as they are more communicative and demand no extra attention from those who see them. But they lack the strength to return to the viewer's reverie, and soon get lost in oblivion.

However, images which might seem to be too complex and non-communicative, may lead others to a mysterious journey into the world of true creativity. I am ready to return to the images in the early paintings of Bikash Bhattacharya or Satyajit Ray's film from the fifties to the mid-seventies for countless times. Yet the images they created later on (at the last phase of their creative journey) are not meaningful to me. They have no redolence. They fail to contribute anything to that secret second world from where a person returns to write poems, compose music or create enduring images.

In a creative process where forms of expression are through images, one must make a journey to the secret second world which one can still find in nature, in music, in great poetry or even in mysterious silences and through one's own experiences with time and dream. A painter or a filmmaker tries to relate those images directly or indirectly through their themes of expression and shape them to that form where in they have lost their origin and with different identities have become images of their creator.

Myths sometimes unknowingly contribute a great deal in giving images their separate identities. In the indelible death scene of Indir Thakrun in *Pather Panchali*, the director simply shows us a vessel rolling into a pond. The unique meaning of this scene can be immediately identified with the Hindu tradition of breaking an earthen pot when someone dies....

An artist's canvas is somehow close to a film screen. In the beginning both of them are clean and clear. Slowly colours and patterns appear on both the canvas and screen. Either they remain for long or soon disappear from the memory of the viewers. No promotion or demotion of media can make it sublime or mundane for a certain time. What an artist paints is traditionally considered a 'static image'. At times a static image can

generate many other images in our minds. Since my days as a student I have been regularly visiting the art galleries and exhibitions in Calcutta. The city had very few galleries then. I used to imagine, after looking at a painting, all that might happen as a sequel to it. I have made 'thinking in images' a habit for myself. Such as continuing to remember a visit to a place only in terms of images.

I carry this process even in listening to music, reading poetry and looking at a painting, for the colours and lines in paintings, words in poetry and melodies in music also generate images. Even if an event or events fail to come sequentially through images of painting, music and poetry we at least start responding to them from deep down in our systems. An uncaring eye can at least attempt to understand the artist's use of colour, his perspectives and angle of vision, light and shade, etc. Of course, this is different in the case of poetry. One finds an element of story from the images coming out of non-descriptive poetry, but the images that flow out of melodies are sometimes only distantly related to each other.

I can name Jibanananda Das whose poems may be a great source of images for a filmmaker ready to respond to the images of the poet. This is also true of many of the poems of Shakti Chattopadhyay. They are always quite unusual, magical, and fascinatingly unpredictable in nature. Their images do not always necessarily come in clear-cut, defined shapes. Certain ambiguities remain in them. These images might change their form and meaning after a second or third reading. If a reader goes through a poem of that sensibility some five times in a span of ten years, he may discover that in each reading the images reveal themselves in different ways. I believe that every intimate reader of poetry realizes and appreciates this.

From childhood I have been deeply moved and stirred

by music, be it wordless melodies and harmonies or songs. The images that are generated from music are different from those of poetry. Images from music, shape most slowly in the mind, and gradually they permeate our consciousness – such images give birth to certain scenes and visions drawn out from deep within our unconscious.

Cinema has a certain relationship with these three kinds of images coming from poetry, painting and music. Images in painting may be static but images in poetry and music are fluid, as in cinema. I have seen that all these three kinds of images have inspired me and at times have led me to visualize and create different kinds of fluid images. I do not know if this happens only with me. Maybe the experiences of other filmmakers are similar. But a viewer can always question these images and discard them as non-real. They do not even accept the fact that these images can *re-interpret* their reality from a different perspective. The problem arises from the beginning, as they don't look to be real. Some critics even place these images in the realms of 'timelessness' and 'universality', as these are very familiar terms for them. But the 'real' and the 'unreal' in my films are always interrelated, one dissolving with the other without making much noise.

A film, on the surface, can have an appearance of the real which is acceptable to its audience. But beneath the surface this reality can have a body of unknown or magical reality. The fact is, if we give a second look at the realities around us instead of taking them for granted we discover the unknown or magical element within the body of that reality. The concept of 'timelessness' sometimes can be experienced in this process.

But universality of course is another matter. Universality depends on the subject matter. There may very well be subjects or themes which are universal —

— that may be understood with the same sentiment today or tomorrow or even after a hundred years. But there is no direct relationship between the concepts of universality and timelessness.

In fact, we can see, read and know about two worlds, one of which is most known and familiar to us, in which we are living and immersed every minute of the day, where we are pulling and being pulled by the various threads of our relationships – feeling sad or happy or protesting against things. Some artists register and recreate or represent this familiar reality of the world in their writings, or paintings, even in their films. But there is another view or perspective which cannot be found at all within this familiar everyday world. You can identify many artists who have explored this other dimension of our world.

EINSTEIN AND TAGORE : MAN, NATURE AND MYSTICISM

DIPANKAR HOME AND ANDREW ROBINSON

In 1983, when the astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar accepted the Nobel prize in Stockholm, he spoke some much-quoted lines of poetry in English translation that he had learnt more than sixty years before, as a boy in India :

Where the mind is without fear and the head is
held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its
way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit...
Into that haven of freedom, Let me awake.'

The lines are from Tagore's *Gitanjali* — except, that is, for the last line. This line Chandrasekhar, being an atheist, had altered, by neatly substituting 'haven' for Tagore's original 'heaven'.²

Science and philosophy, leave alone science and religion, have made uncomfortable bedfellows during the twentieth century. In the emphatic words of Steven Weinberg, particle physicist and Nobel laureate, writing in 1992, 'I know of *no one* who has participated actively in the advance of physics in the post-war period whose research has been significantly helped by the work of philosophers.'³

Nevertheless, many of the greatest physicists, including four of the founders of quantum theory, Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and Schrödinger, are well known for their keen interest in philosophy. Fundamental conceptual weaknesses in quantum theory disturbed Einstein until his death in 1955. Now there is an even greater need for new ideas: laboratory experiments at the subatomic level, inspired by the theoretical work of John Bell, claim to have shown that Einstein's notion of 'local reality' — that any individual object, however small, possesses dynamical properties (at all instants) which cannot be affected by an instantaneous action at a distance—is untenable.⁴ It seems that quantum reality differs profoundly from macroscopic reality. And as history reminds us, metaphysics does periodically become physics. 'The best-known example is the interior of the atom, which was considered to be a metaphysical subject before Rutherford's proposal of his nuclear model, in 1911,' wrote Eugene Wigner in 1962, in an influential article speculating on the role of mind/consciousness in quantum physics.⁵ Today consciousness, which until recently was felt to be 'either purely "philosophical" or too elusive to study experimentally' (Francis Crick), has become an area of serious scientific study.⁶

As a result of this interest, Einstein's discussions with Tagore in 1930 concerning the nature of reality and the relationship of determinism to free will are now seen to merit more than a tiny footnote in the history of quantum theory. Publicised at the time — initially in the *New York Times* — they continue to provoke comment among a wide range of people because they tackle some of the fundamental questions debated within science over the past half-century. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* quotes from one of their conversations in its entry on Einstein, for instance;⁷ so did Ronald W. Clark in his major biography of Einstein (a book admired by Heisenberg for its carefulness);⁸ and the physicist Abraham Pais, Einstein's scientific biographer, devoted several pages of his 1994 book *Einstein Lived Here*, to Tagore (though his account contains serious inaccuracies).⁹ Among other scientists, Brian Josephson, a physics Nobel laureate at Cambridge University, has commented that, 'Tagore is, I think, saying that truth is a subtler concept than Einstein realises';¹⁰ while Ilya Prigogine, a chemistry Nobel laureate, in 1984 went so far as to say, 'Curiously enough, the present evolution of science is running in the direction stated by the great Indian poet.'¹¹

Tagore was interested in science from an early age. His first ever essay (published in serial form), written in the 1870s when he was barely a teenager, was on astronomy. In his late thirties and forties, around the turn of the century, he strongly advocated the work of the physicist and plant physiologist Jagadish Chandra Bose.¹² In Britain, in 1920, Tagore made a special point of visiting the observatory in Greenwich, where the Astronomer Royal showed him the photographic plate of the solar eclipse that had apparently confirmed Einstein's theory of general relativity in 1919.¹³ And in the mid-1930s, when he was in his mid-seventies, encouraged by the astrophysicist Meghnad Saha and others, Tagore took up the study of

science in earnest and wrote a short book in Bengali for young students (translated as *Our Universe*), which he dedicated to his fellow Bengali S. N. Bose (of boson fame), who had earlier won Einstein's recognition for his work on light quanta. Tagore was very disappointed to miss, through illness, meeting Arthur Eddington on his visit to India in late 1937. (In a letter to him, Eddington observed, unprompted, 'I think it is true that as scientific thought goes deeper it finds much in common with Indian philosophy.'¹⁴)

Tagore did however meet the German physicist Arnold Sommerfeld and his former student Heisenberg, when they lectured in India in 1928 and 1929 respectively. Sommerfeld visited Tagore's university at Shantiniketan and later published a vivid description of Tagore, comparing him to 'old Goethe' in his 'infinite diligence'.¹⁵ Heisenberg spent an afternoon talking to Tagore about Indian philosophy at his mansion in Calcutta. Though neither man wrote about the encounter, Heisenberg did speak of it much later on several occasions. One of these was in conversation with his doctoral student Helmut Rechenberg, who is now in charge of Heisenberg's papers at the Max Planck Institute for Physics in Munich; Rechenberg remembers it 'quite vividly'.¹⁶

Tagore and Einstein first met during his second visit to Germany in mid-1926, though Einstein was certainly aware of Tagore by 1919 (probably earlier), when together they had signed an anti-war 'declaration of the independence of the spirit'.¹⁷ Their conversation in 1926 was not recorded as it would be later, but Einstein's (German) letter written to Tagore afterwards, survives. Its tone of respect testifies to more than mere courtesy: 'If there is anything in Germany that you would like and which could be done by me, I beg you to command me at any time.'¹⁸ This was followed by a kind of love letter to Tagore, written in broken English by Einstein's young

step-daughter Margot: 'At once, I ran to father with your letter to read to him, father loves you too, you know, he was happy with me.'¹⁹

The second meeting with Einstein took place in July 1930, when Tagore arrived in Germany from Britain. He had just given the Hibbert lectures in Oxford, later published as *The Religion of Man* with an appendix including his conversation with Einstein. These lectures drew freely upon science and maintained that 'We can never go beyond man in all that we know and feel.'²⁰ Tagore was undoubtedly charged with such thinking when he talked to Einstein.

They met at least four times in 1930. In view of the confusion that has surrounded these meetings, the dates and places are worth noting. The first occasion was on 14 July in Einstein's villa at Caputh, near Berlin; the second was on 19 August, at Berlin; the third was in late September, also at Berlin, after Tagore's return from Moscow (where he was accompanied by a party including Margot Einstein); and the fourth took place in mid-December in New York City. Here, the *New York Times* reported, Einstein and Tagore spent a morning in 'animated' conversation; a striking photograph showed them together, with the teasing caption, 'A Mathematician and a Mystic Meet in Manhattan'.²¹

The earlier two conversations were published: the first one (that on 14 July) in the *New York Times* magazine on 10 August, the second (that on 19 August) in the New York-based magazine *Asia*.²² Both conversations concern science, but the first, on reality, is more significant. The newspaper featured it prominently beneath the headline 'Einstein and Tagore Plumb the Truth'. The byline was given by Dmitri Marianoff, a Russian journalist known to the Einsteins for several years, who married Margot Einstein in November 1930. In his preamble, Marianoff wrote: 'It was interesting to see them together — Tagore,

the poet with the head of a thinker, and Einstein, the thinker with the head of a poet... Neither sought to press his opinion. But it seemed to an observer as though two planets were engaged in a chat.'

Three months later, in October, Einstein wrote a short piece about Tagore. He did so at the request of their mutual friend and fellow Nobel laureate, Romain Rolland, who was planning a grand global *Festschrift* for Tagore's seventieth birthday (published in 1931 as *The Golden Book of Tagore*, with Einstein as one of its sponsors). But, in answering Rolland's letter, Einstein started a small controversy. He wrote (in German): 'I shall be glad to... add a brief contribution. My conversation with Tagore was rather unsuccessful because of difficulties in communication and should, of course, never have been published. In my contribution, I should like to give expression to my conviction that men who enjoy the reputation of great intellectual achievement have an obligation to lend moral support to the principle of unconditional refusal of war service.'²³ Rolland agreed to this offer.

Immediately, however, Einstein totally changed his mind about the content of his contribution. Instead of writing on pacifism, he wrote on causality, determinism and free will.²⁴ Why? And why had he changed his mind about the publication of the July conversation in the *New York Times*? He had been fully informed of the plan to publish it, indeed he had corrected a draft of the conversation in mid-July.²⁵ Tagore had no role in this, though he too had his reservations : when *he* published the conversation in Calcutta a few months later (and subsequently as an appendix to *The Religion of Man*), he made significant changes, restoring certain passages cut from the draft seen by Einstein and adding some new material to clarify his own point of view.²⁶ Were Tagore's reservations similar to Einstein's?

The answers to these questions must be largely a matter of conjecture, since neither man commented further on his reasons, at least not directly.²⁷ They invite us to consider the complex and baffling issues thrown up by quantum mechanics that Einstein debated at length with Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger and others from 1926 onwards, during the same period as his conversations with Tagore.

A lack of philosophical communication between Einstein and Tagore certainly is evident from the published record. While the language barrier played some part in this — Einstein spoke in German, Tagore in English — its roots go deeper. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin (who was present at Tagore's Oxford lectures) commented in 1993, 'I do not believe that, apart from professions of mutual regard and the fact that Einstein and Tagore were both sincere and highly gifted and idealistic thinkers, there was much in common between them — although their social ideals may well have been very similar.'²⁸ During the 1930s, Einstein was not apparently influenced by Tagore, nor Tagore by Einstein, though it is said that Tagore turned down an offer of an honorary doctorate from Berlin University in protest against Nazi treatment of Einstein? In later years, Einstein is known to have referred to Tagore privately by the punning name 'Rabbi' Tagore. Isaiah Berlin: 'I think [this] was meant to be ironical, in the gentlest way. Einstein did not hold with rabbis much; still less with quantum physics.'

Instead of their minds meeting, the two men seem mostly to have talked past each other, where they did not openly disagree. A comparable mismatch occurred, famously, between Einstein and Bohr, and lasted for thirty years right up to Einstein's death. A frustrated Bohr was never able to bring Einstein round to accepting the majority view of quantum mechanics. Although the

philosophical views of Bohr and Tagore differ in crucial respects, there are important similarities too. It is fruitful to compare the Einstein—Bohr and Einstein—Tagore relationships. We shall look first at that of Einstein and Bohr. In classical physics, the macroscopic world, that of our daily experience, is taken to exist independently of observers: the moon is there whether one looks at it or not, in the well-known example of Einstein. And the same may be conceived to be true of the subatomic world. That is what is meant by 'realism': the philosophical position of, say, Descartes — that the physical world has objectivity that transcends direct experience, and that propositions are true or false independently of our ability to discern which they are.

But in quantum physics — at least according to the standard' interpretation of quantum theory, the Copenhagen interpretation (named after its Danish origin and father, Bohr) — reality looks different, particularly at small scales. An electron, for instance, no longer has properties such as position, momentum, energy, in the absence of an observation/measurement. In the words of Heisenberg, whose uncertainty principle lies at the heart of the Copenhagen interpretation, 'The laws of nature which we formulate mathematically in quantum theory deal no longer with the elementary particles themselves but with our knowledge of the particles.'³¹ The nature of reality in the Copenhagen interpretation is therefore essentially epistemological, that is all meaningful statements about the physical world are based on knowledge derived from observations. 'No elementary phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is a recorded phenomenon,' to quote a dictum of the quantum theorist John Wheeler.³² This philosophical stance contains elements of positivism, the point of view strongly developed in the later nineteenth century before the advent of quantum theory by physicists such as Ernst

Mach (who argued against the concept of the atom as being a mystical entity).

Einstein was at first a staunch positivist, but during the 1920s he became an equally staunch realist, and remained so thereafter. In 1950, he told the philosopher Karl Popper that he regretted no 'mistake' (Einstein's word) more than his original belief in positivism.³³ His turn to classical realism began, according to Helmut Reichenberg, with the success of his general relativity theory, i.e. after 1916; but probably his earliest unequivocal assertion of this shift in his thinking occurred in 1926 in his conversations with Heisenberg. According to the latter, Einstein declared himself sceptical of quantum theory because it concerned 'what we know about nature', no longer 'what nature really does'. In science, said Einstein, 'we ought to be concerned solely with what nature does'.³⁴ Both Heisenberg and Bohr disagreed: in Bohr's view, it was 'wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how nature *is*. Physics concerns what we can say about nature.'³⁵ At the Solvay conferences in 1927 and 1930, Einstein pressed his point of view, and in 1935 published (with Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen) the famous EPR paper, in which he argued with the help of a 'thought experiment' that 'If, without in any way disturbing a system, we can predict with certainty... the value of a physical quantity, then there exists an element of physical reality' — in other words a 'local' reality — 'corresponding to this physical quantity'.³⁶

Bohr, however, refuted this reasoning — to the apparent satisfaction of the majority of physicists.³⁷ How many really understood him is dubious, considering that even a leading theorist such as John Bell did not, as he freely admitted repeatedly in various writings.³⁸ However, in the light of all the experiments that have so far tested Bell's theorem, many physicists (though not all) accept that the locality condition used by Einstein, Podolsky and

Rosen in their analysis is not valid in the quantum world. (Nevertheless, we should note that the experiments on Bell's theorem do not negate the concept of realism per se, but only a particular form of realism based on Einstein's locality condition. The general idea behind realism — that quantum entities have well-defined objective properties even in the absence of any measurement — remains a logically tenable proposition. This is most convincingly shown by the formulation of an alternative interpretation of quantum mechanics — à La de Broglie and David Bohm — based on a realist model, objective but nonlocal — which explains in a perfectly consistent way all known quantum phenomena.³⁹) Schrödinger was the only one among the founders of quantum theory who was sympathetic to Einstein's position, but he could not entirely accept it. In their correspondence, Einstein accused the Copenhagen interpretation of being a 'tranquilising philosophy', metaphysical, nothing more than 'a soft pillow on which to lay one's head', rather than engaging reality face to face; Bohr, Einstein told Schrödinger in 1939, was a 'mystic, who forbids, as being unscientific, an inquiry about something that exists independently of whether or not it is observed.'⁴⁰

Einstein's conversations with Tagore in 1930, shortly before he tussled with Bohr at the Solvay conference in October, express his hardening adherence to realism in a remarkably clear-cut fashion. This extract is from the conversation (as vetted by Einstein) reported in the *New York Times* :

E : There are two different conceptions about the nature of the universe — the world as a unity dependent on humanity, and the world as reality independent of the human factor...

T : This world is a human world — the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. Therefore, the world apart from us does not exist; it is a relative

world, depending for its reality upon our consciousness.

A little later, Einstein took up the point again :

E : Truth, then, or beauty, is not independent of man?

T : No.

E : If there were no human beings any more, the Apollo Belvedere no longer would be beautiful?

T : No.

E : I agree with regard to this conception of beauty, but not with regard to truth.

T : Why not? Truth is realised through men.

(Here, according to a later account by the note-taker Marianoff, there was a long pause. Then Einstein spoke again very quietly and softly.⁴¹)

E : I cannot prove my conception is right, but that is my religion.

After some further discussion — in which Einstein asserted, 'I cannot prove, but I believe in the Pythagorean argument, that the truth is independent of human beings,' and Tagore countered with a reference to ancient Indian philosophy, to 'Brahman, the absolute truth, which cannot be conceived by the isolation of the individual mind or described in words, but can be realised only by merging the individual in its infinity' — Einstein became concrete:

E : The mind acknowledges realities outside of it, independent of it. For instance, nobody may be in this house, yet that table remains where it is.

T : Yes, it remains outside the individual mind, but not the universal mind. The table is that which is perceptible by some kind of consciousness we possess.

- E : If nobody were in the house the table would exist all the same, but this is already illegitimate from your point of view, because we cannot explain what it means, that the table is there, independently of us. Our natural point of view in regard to the existence of truth apart from humanity cannot be explained or proved, but it is a belief which nobody can lack — not even primitive beings. We attribute to truth a superhuman objectivity. It is indispensable for us — this reality which is independent of our existence and our experience and our mind — though we cannot say what it means.
- T : In any case, if there be any truth absolutely unrelated to humanity, then for us it is absolutely nonexistent.
- E : Then I am more religious than you are!

(Here, said Marianoff, Einstein 'exclaimed in triumph'.)

The position of Einstein in this last extract is reminiscent of his well-known paradox: 'The most incomprehensible fact about nature is that it is comprehensible.'⁴² Nature, for Einstein, had to be independent of man and mind. As he insisted in his question printed in *The Golden Book of Tagore*, 'Man defends himself from being regarded as an impotent object in the course of the Universe. But should the lawfulness of events, such as unveils itself more or less clearly in inorganic nature, cease to function in front of the activities in our brain?'⁴³

Einstein could not accept any idea that a universal mind might control nature. Tagore, by contrast, could accept this. As he said to Einstein, 'What we call truth lies in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality, both of which belong to the superpersonal man.' In other words, Tagore did not adhere either to Einstein's realist, essentially objective position or to Bohr's quasi-positivistic, essentially

subjective view of nature, a position that, taken to its logical extreme, denies the existence of the physical world — or at least its dynamical properties — until they are measured. Tagore did not deny the existence of the table when nobody was in the house, but he argued that its existence becomes meaningful for us only when it is perceived by some conscious mind. And he said, further, that there is a universality in the nature of consciousness (contrary to our normal sense of consciousness as being essentially private). Galileo's experiments with falling stones would be interpreted in the same way by all humans who today perform the experiments notes Ilya Prigogine. 'In a sense, this is a result of a common structure of consciousness for all humans.'⁴⁴

What did Tagore mean by this concept of a universal human mind? He once wrote, 'The Universe is like a cobweb and minds are the spiders; for mind is one as well as many.'⁴⁵ He tried to amplify and clarify his meaning in his own version of the conversation with Einstein published in *The Religion of Man*. (He did so partly by restoring two passages cut from the draft of the conversation before it was printed in the *New York Times*.) Pursuing the example of the table, he said :

Science has proved that the table as a solid object is an appearance and therefore that which the human mind perceives as a table would not exist if that mind were naught. At the same time it must be admitted that the fact that the ultimate physical reality of the table is nothing but a multitude of separate revolving centres of electric force, also belongs to the human mind.

In the apprehension of truth there is an eternal conflict between the universal human mind and the same mind confined in the individual. The

perpetual process of reconciliation is being carried on in our science, philosophy, in our ethics.⁴⁶

This statement resembles remarkably one made by Einstein's friend, the physicist Max Born: 'All religions, philosophies, and sciences have been evolved for the purpose of expanding the ego to the wider community that "we" represent.' Ironically, Born wrote it in 1920 in his famous introduction to Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*.⁴⁷

If mind/consciousness, the first-person perspective, is somehow to be incorporated into physics, as certain physicists believe it should be, this would entail consequences as dramatic as those involved in the introduction of relativity by Einstein, for it would mean an acceptance that 'the lawfulness of events, such as unveils itself more or less clearly in inorganic nature' may, at least in principle, 'cease to function in front of the activities in our brain' — to answer Einstein's sceptical question addressed to Tagore in the affirmative. But Einstein could never accept this : he was committed to the realism, determinism and strict causality of classical physics, as he made plain to Tagore in their second, more free-ranging conversation on 19 August 1930. Tagore, who was staying with a scientific friend of Einstein in Berlin, introduced the subject :

T : I was discussing with Dr Mendel today the new mathematical discoveries which tell us that in the realm of infinitesimal atoms chance has its play; the drama of existence is not absolutely predestined in character.

E : The facts that make science tend towards this view do not say goodbye to causality.

T : Maybe not; but it appears that the idea of causality is not in the elements, that some other force builds up with them an organised universe.

E : One tries to understand how the order is in the higher plane. The order is there, where the big elements combine and guide existence; but in the minute elements this order is not perceptible.

T : This duality is in the depths of existence — the contradiction of free impulse and directive will which works upon it and evolves an orderly scheme of things.

E : Modern physics would not say they are contradictory. Clouds look one from a distance, but, if you see them near, they show themselves in disorderly drops of water.

T : I find a parallel in human psychology. Our passions and desires are unruly, but our character subdues these elements into a harmonious whole.

Interestingly, Bohr made a similar point to Einstein, writing in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* at the time of Einstein's seventieth birthday in 1949 : Actually, words like "thoughts" and "sentiments",... indispensable to illustrate the variety and scope of conscious life, are used in a similar complimentary way as space-time coordination and dynamical conservation laws in atomic physics.⁴⁸ Einstein did not concur.

Tagore continued :

T : Are the elements rebellious, dynamic with individual impulse? And is there a principle in the physical world which dominates them and puts them into an orderly organisation?

E : Even the elements are not without statistical order, elements of radium will always maintain their specific order, now and ever onwards, just as they have done all along. There is, then, a statistical order in the elements.

T: Otherwise the drama of existence would be too desultory. It is the constant harmony of chance and determination which makes it eternally new and living.

E: I believe that whatever we do or live for has its causality; it is good, however, that we cannot look through it.

Here, in this short exchange, would appear to be the kernel of Einstein's ambivalence towards Tagore: why he changed his mind about the publication of their first conversation (on 14 July), and why he unexpectedly chose to write on determinism and free will, rather than on his promised pacifism, in Tagore's birthday *Festschrift*. Significantly, Bertrand Russell, Einstein's friend and collaborator, was ambivalent about Tagore too. Although Russell praised Tagore highly in the *Festschrift* and published in his *Autobiography* (1967) an appreciative philosophical letter on himself from Tagore, he wrote privately about the letter at the same time to a Bengali acquaintance: 'I regret I cannot agree with Tagore. His talk about the infinite is vague nonsense. The sort of language that is admired by many Indians unfortunately does not, in fact, mean anything at all.'⁴⁹

'I suspect Einstein... thought Tagore was talking nonsense,' remarks Brian Josephson (who, as we know, finds Tagore the subtler thinker about truth).⁵⁰ This is most likely correct, but it is also probable — given Einstein's undoubtedly genuine respect for Tagore — that Einstein was slightly stung by what seemed to be Tagore's (and even more Bohr's) dogmatic unwillingness to perceive what he, Einstein, effortlessly saw: a profound order in nature, 'out there', quite independent of the human mind. Einstein's seventieth birthday message to Tagore in effect reproves him for his dogmatism in the

gentlest way; as does Einstein's later punning reference to Tagore as 'Rabbi'.

To summarise, then, we can discern three philosophical positions concerning the relationship between man and nature arising from the Einstein—Tagore conversations. The first, held by Einstein, is that nature exists, objectively, whether we know it or not. Hence Einstein thought it was essential to describe 'what nature does' instead of merely speaking of 'what we know about nature' (to repeat his earlier comments to Heisenberg). The second position, held by Bohr, is that the objective existence of nature has no meaning independent of the measurement process. The third position, held by Tagore, is more complex, because it requires mind/consciousness — in contrast to Bohr's (and of course Einstein's) position, but in line with certain subsequent interpretations of quantum theory that invoke the existence of 'many worlds'. Tagore says, centrally, that nature can be conceived only in terms of our mental constructions based on what we think we perceive: 'This world is a human world — the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man' (to repeat his earlier statement). Tagore says further — and it is a separate though dependent point — that there exists a universal mind: 'What we call truth lies in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality, both of which belong to the superpersonal man... if there be any truth absolutely unrelated to humanity, then for us it is absolutely nonexisting' (to reiterate what he told Einstein).

Tagore's position has some similarity with the work of various contemporary philosophers. Hilary Putnam, in particular, has attempted to break what he calls the 'stranglehold' on our thinking of the dichotomy between objective and subjective views of truth and reason, by inserting mind into reality. In *The Many Faces of Realism*, he argued that, metaphorically speaking, 'the mind and

the world jointly' make up the mind and the world'.⁵¹ And he went on to reject the existence of 'intrinsic' properties — e.g. the position and momentum of an electron ('local realism') — of the kind integral to classical physics and to Einstein in the EPR experiment, properties that, in the words of Putnam, 'something has "in itself", apart from any contribution made by language or the mind'.⁵²

Another relevant philosopher is Thomas Nagel. Though his position differs more from Tagore's than does Putnam's, Nagel shares Tagore's fundamental concern: to create a world view that reconciles the objective viewpoint — what Nagel calls 'the centreless universe' — with that of the self, by integrating the two viewpoints with consciousness. He argues that, 'The subjectivity of consciousness is an irreducible feature of reality — without which we couldn't do physics or anything else — and it must occupy as fundamental a place in any credible world view as matter, energy, space, time and numbers.'⁵³

Obviously these are extremely difficult problems with an ancient philosophical and scientific pedigree. In 1611, Galileo noted that 'it would seem ridiculous to me to believe that things in nature begin to exist when we begin to discover and understand them'⁵⁴ Einstein went on worrying at 'the reality question' until the day he died; so, less conspicuously, did Tagore. Neither came to a definite conclusion. (In 1950 Einstein even informed Schrödinger that determinism was 'a thoroughly nebulous concept anyway'.⁵⁵) All three of the above philosophical positions have adherents throughout science today, with Bohr's predominating among quantum physicists and Tagore's the least accepted of the three. None the less, towards the end of his life, Schrödinger came to a view analogous to Tagore's, that 'The world is a construct of our sensations, perceptions, memories. It is convenient to regard it as existing

objectively on its own. But it certainly does not become manifest by its mere existence.⁵⁶ — while David Bohm, in later years, believed that 'it is the brain that creates the illusion of location' of physical matter in the macroscopic world.⁵⁷

It will be interesting to see how the balance of scientific opinion on these great questions alters as science changes. Will Ilya Prigogine's bold prediction — that science is evolving according to Tagore — come true during the next century? Or, as many scientists hope, will increasing knowledge of brain functioning and deeper insights into quantum mechanics and molecular biology make consciousness amenable to being understood in terms of the existing laws of physics, these having been suitably modified?⁵⁸ Perhaps, for the purposes of this paper, Tagore should have the last word. Here is virtually the last poem he wrote, aged eighty, shortly before he 'lost consciousness':

The sun of the first day
Put the question
To the new manifestation of life — Who are you?
There was no answer.
Years passed by.
The last sun of the last day
Uttered the question on the shore of the western
sea,
In the hush of evening — Who are you!
No answer came.⁵⁹

Notes and References

1. *Gitanjali*, pp. 27—8/*Naivedya*, RR, VIII, pp. 56, 58.
2. The last two lines, as written by Tagore, read, 'Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.' We thank the

- late Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar for drawing our attention to his version (Chandrasekhar to Andrew Robinson, 3 March 1993). 'Perhaps, I may venture to say that Tagore's use of "heaven" is a mild mixed metaphor : on land, one can reach a haven but not Heaven' (Chandrasekhar to Andrew Robinson, 15 March 1994).
3. Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (London, 1993), p. 134 (Italics are Weinberg's).
 4. An overview of studies relating to Bell's work is provided in A. F. van der Merwe, F. Selleri and G. Tarozzi (eds.), *Bell's Theorem and the Foundations of Modern Physics* (Singapore, 1992).
 5. Wigner, 'Remarks on the mind-body question', in I. J. Good (ed.), *The Scientist Speculates — An Anthology of Partly-Baked Ideas* (London, 1962), p.299.
 6. Francis Crick and Christof Koch, 'The problem of consciousness', *Scientific American*, Sept. 1992, p.153.
 7. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edn, XVIII, p. 157.
 8. Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (New York, 1971), pp. 414—15.
 9. Abraham Pais, *Einstein Lived Here* (New York, 1994), pp. 99—108. Pais makes many errors about RT's life, confuses the various meetings between RT and Einstein and, most importantly, does not use the *New York Times* version of the Einstein—Tagore conversation, which Einstein vetted.
 10. Brian D. Josephson to Andrew Robinson, 11 Dec. 1992.
 11. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (London, 1984), p. 293.
 12. See letter 27.
 13. Rathindranath Tagore, *Edges of Time*, p. 113.
 14. Eddington to RT, 7 Feb. 1938 [RB].
 15. 'Arnold Sommerfeld: his life, work and an impression of his recent visit to India', *MR*. June 1929, pp. 738—9. This article contains translated extracts from an article by Sommerfeld on his Indian visit.
 16. On the Tagore—Heisenberg relationship, see Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 442—3.
 17. See Rolland, *Selected Letters*, pp. 10—12.
 18. Einstein to RT, 25 Sept. 1926 [RB]. The letter is in German.
 19. Margot Einstein to RT, 20 Sept. 1926 [RB].
 20. *Religion of Man*, p. 114.
 21. *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 1930. According to Subrahmanyam

- Chandrasekhar, the physicist A. H. Compton used to keep this photograph of Einstein and Tagore in his office.
22. The *New York Times* conversation appears in Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Anthology*, pp. 230-33. The *Asia* conversation appears in the issue of March 1931, pp. 140-2. Gertrude Emerson (Sen), then an editor for *Asia*, was responsible for publishing it. She was present at the Dec. 1930 meeting between RT and Einstein in New York; see her account in Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *Golden Book*, p. 80.
 23. Einstein to Rolland, 10 Oct. 1930, in Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden, *Einstein on Peace* (New York, 1960), p. 112.
 24. Einstein, 'About free will', in Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *Golden Book*, pp. 11-12; a slightly modified translation of Einstein's contribution appears in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2, No. 2 Summer 1995, p. 172.
 25. See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 446.
 26. The conversation was published as 'The nature of reality', *Mu*, Jan, 1231, pp 42-3, and later in the *Religion of Man*, The original draft, sent to RT by the New York Times before publication, is kept at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiketan.
 27. RT wrote an article about his meetings with Einstein, which was published in *Asia*, March 1931, pp. 139-40. It contains some interesting hints about their philosophical disagreement but nothing definite about it.
 28. Berlin to Andrew Robinson, 15 March 1993.
 29. See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 344.
 30. Pais, *Einstein Lived Here*, p.99; Berlin to Andrew Robinson, 24 May 1993.
 31. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature* (London, 1955), p. 15; see also Wolfgang Pauli (ed.), *Niels Bohr and the Development of Physics* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 12-29.
 32. John Wheeler, *At Home in the Universe* (New York, 1994), p. 120.
 33. Quoted in Karl Popper, *Unended Quest* (Glasgow, 1976), p. 97.
 34. Quoted in Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond* (London, 1971), p. 68.
 35. Quoted in Abraham Pais, *Niels Bohr's Times in Physics; Philosophy, and Polity* (Oxford, 1991), p. 427.
 36. A. Einstein, B. Podolsky and N. Rosen, 'Can quantum mechanical description of physical reality be considered complete?', *Physical Review*, 47, 1935, p. 777.

37. Bohr, 'Can quantum mechanical description of reality be considered complete?', *Physical Review*, 48, 1935. pp. 696—700.
38. For instance, J. S. Bell, *Speakabk and Unspeakabk in Quantum Mechanics* (Cambridge, 1987). This paper was first published in 1981.
39. See, for example, P. Holland, *The Quantum Theory of Motion* (Cambridge, 1993), and David Bohm and B. J. Hiley, *The Undivided Universe* (London, 1993).
40. Quoted in K. Przibram (ed.), *Letters on Wave Mechanics* (New York, 1950), p. 44.
41. Quoted in Dmitri Marianoff, *Einstein: An Intimate Study of a Great Man* (New York, 1944), pp. 73—7, a not wholly reliable account of the Einstein—Tagore meeting in July 1930, at which Marianoff was a note-taker.
42. Quoted in, for example, Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar, 'Science and scientific attitudes', *Nature*, 344, 1990, pp. 285.
43. Einstein, 'About free will', in Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *Golden Book*, p. 12.
44. Prigogine to Andrew Robinson, 26 July 1993.
45. Quoted in Schlomith Flauni, 'At the feet of my master', *Palestine News*, 23 Aug. 1941 (original source unknown).
46. Appendix to *Religion of Man*, pp. 224-8.
47. Introduction to Albert Einstein, *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (Max Born ed., Henry L. Brose trans.; London, 1924), p.4.
48. Bohr, 'Discussion with Einstein on epistemological problems in atomic physics', in Paul Arthur Schilpp (ed.), *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* (Evanston, 1949), p. 224.
49. Russell to N. Chatterji, 26 April 1967 [copy at McMasterj.]
50. Josephson to Andrew Robinson, 17 June 1993.
51. Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (La Salle, 1987), p. 1. We thank Amartya Sen for suggesting the idea of comparisons with the work of Putnam and Nagel.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
53. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York, 1989), pp. 7—8, 55.
54. Galileo to Pietro Dini, quoted in A. van der Merwe et al. (eds.), *50 Years of the EPR Paper* (Dordrecht, 1985), p. 262.
55. Quoted in Przibram, *Letters*, p.40.
56. 'The physical basis or consciousness', in Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 93.
57. Conversation with Dipankar Home, 1991.

58. See, for example, Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind : A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (Oxford, 1994), and discussions of his work in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 1994.
59. Shesh Lekha, RR, XXVI, pp. 49—50 (27 July 1941). The translation is by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson.

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POLES OF RECOVERY

AMIT CHAUDHURI

1. The Moor's Legacy

When I was an undergraduate at University College, London in the early Eighties, cultivating a life of self-imposed loneliness, I would be pursued by a man of indeterminate nationality. He could have been from Latin America; when I asked him where he came from, he replied with a snort, 'Let us say... from one of the industrialized nations.' His interest in me wasn't amorous; his intention was, curiously – once he'd found out I was from India – to humiliate me in the way I've just mentioned.

I think he was lonelier than I was; bearded, overcoated, his face raw with a skin disorder and his eyes framed by thick glasses, he had the air of a graduate student whose project had gone nowhere. He lighted upon me on the steps of Senate House or the Students Union Building,

or on one of the roads outside. It was in front of the Dillon's Bookshop that he asked me (he'd obviously discovered I was a student of English, and that I had ambitions as a writer, though I can't recall when I divulged this information to him) a question that caused me some discomfort: 'Why don't you write in your own language?' I mumbled something in reply; I hoped he'd go away. It's not that I didn't have a reason: I, a Bengali, had grown up in Bombay, and, not having been taught Bengali in school, didn't know it well enough to write poetry or fiction in it. My literary models and aspirations belonged to the English language; yet, secretly, I'd long been troubled by what my inquisitor implied: that you can't achieve anything worthwhile in literature unless you write in your 'own' language.

It becomes easier to understand my particular disquiet, the reasons for my being in England, standing outside Dillon's, and my ambition to be a writer in the English language, by looking back to Michael Madhusudan Dutt, with whom, in India, such journeys and disquiets largely begin. I, indeed, found myself reacquainting myself with his life and, in a small way, his work, for the purposes of an anthology I was editing. He was, of course, already familiar to me as a mythological figure in my childhood, the first figure to give literary history in India, in effect, a sense of theatre; like Shakespeare's Moor, to whom his contemporaries compared him, his life and practice form a parable of inner and actual exile, a negotiation between the 'civilized' and the 'barbaric'.

Dutt was born in 1824 into a well-to-do middle-class family, in a Bengal where a native bourgeoisie and intelligentsia had already come into being. Inscribed into his life is another narrative, to do with the secular, middle-class Indian self's struggle between disowning and recovering its – for the want of a better word – 'Indianness', a struggle that, as I was compiling material

for the anthology, I found was a paradigm around which a substantial part of 'modern' Indian literature and culture was structured.

Dutt studied at the Bishop's College and the Hindu College in Calcutta, where, not long before, the Anglo-Portuguese poet, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, had taught. By the time Dutt arrived there, the major articulations of modernity by Indians, in the spheres of religious and social reform, were already marked by conflicting currents of disowning and recovery. Raja Rammohun Roy had founded the reformist sect, the Brahmo Samaj, in 1828; it constituted, after Roy's contact with the culture and religion of the British colonizer (and owing not a little to the Islamic culture of the past), a rejection, or disowning, of the polytheistic, idolatrous aspects of Hinduism. But instead of completing this act of disowning, and converting to Christianity, Roy transformed it into an act of recovery by turning back to the Upanishads, and enlisting the nameless monotheistic deity in their passages as the foundation for a transcendental protestantism.

The figure of Michael Madhusudan Dutt belongs to this context – of Roy, of the intermittently comic, but nevertheless seminal, radicalism of Young Bengal, of the breaking of dietary and religious taboos, of social reform. In his personal and creative life, we see, again, the related impulses towards, on the one hand, the disowning of tradition, and its recovery as a creative constituent of the secular self on the other. Crucially, however, he translates the public acts of disowning and recovery that, so far, marked the spheres of religious debate and social reform, into the personal sphere of art. In a sense, almost, he suddenly, and unprecedentedly, gifts the Bengali a relationship between identity, rebellion, creativity, and the subconscious.

Dutt began his creative endeavour by writing poetry

in the English language, and completed a substantial work, *The Captive Ladie*; his ambition was to be a canonical 'English' poet. When still a student, he converted to Christianity; this was his first great act of disowning. Whether he converted in reaction to the Hinduism he, like many of his generation, had come to feel impatient with, or in his desire to become more completely 'English' (and further his career as an 'English' poet), or in defiance of his father, is not known. At any rate, he hardly seems to have led a conventional 'Christian' life. If Dutt disowned his father and his religion, his father, in turn, disowned him, quite literally. The Oeidpal conflict between father and son may not necessarily be the most productive way of looking at Indian culture, but it would certainly seem to play a part in shaping Dutt's life; it would appear, modernity entered Bengali culture and poetry, via Dutt, not by a slaying of the colonizer, but of the father.

Around the late 1850s, after the long process of disowning, began the process of recovery, the reappropriation, by Dutt, of the Bengali language and culture, culminating in his epic poem, *Meghnad Badha Kavya*. Now, rejecting the language in which he had invested his literary ambitions, he turned to his mother-tongue, not yet quite a respectable language for the middle class. Already, before embarking on the epic, he had written the long Bengali poem, 'Tilottama Sambhava'; in a long vivid letter written in English, on 15th May, 1860, he had confessed to his friend Raj Narain: 'I am going on with Meghnad by fits and starts. Perhaps the poem will be finished by the end of the year.' Then, in some flippant sentences, he delineated the nature of the recovery he was undertaking: 'I am glad you like the opening lines. I must tell you, my dear fellow, that though, as a jolly Christian youth, I don't care a pin's head for Hinduism, I love the grand mythology of our

ancestors. It is full of poetry.' This is followed by an exclamation both excited and desperate, an almost maritime, Raleigh-like view of literary possibility: 'What a vast field does our country now present for literary enterprise! I wish to God, I had time.' The word 'enterprise' is both striking and estranging; it reminds us, at once, of the material contexts, in a Bengal of middlemen, of Dutt's epic inversion; and of the fact that the literary pioneer is part visionary and part adventurer.

Dutt's comic but grandiose remarks about not caring 'a pin's head for Hinduism', but loving, all the same, 'the grand mythology of [his] ancestors' for its poetry contain a serious and, till then, unexpressed truth. For Dutt speaks not so much as a 'jolly Christian youth' as a very early vehicle for what we now rather vaguely call the 'secular' Indian sensibility, to which the rejection of indigenous culture and religion, relegating them to the realm of superstition and irrationality, would be an important act on the one hand; as would, on the other, its recovery of that very culture as a life-giving, if perennially problematic, part of itself. Roughly after Dutt's casual exhortations, the gods and goddesses would begin to appear not as deities, as they would to a devotee, but as actors upon the stage of the 'secular' consciousness, to which their meaning and power would no longer be orthodoxly religious, but nevertheless profound. It was a form of '*darshan*'; but the passive and grateful devotion of the worshipper had been transformed into slightly adversarial gaze of the romantic visionary.

Disowning and recovery are, indeed, written into the very composition of *Meghnad Badha Kavya* : Dutt's rejection of English in favour of Bengali for the purposes of writing his epic was itself an immensely significant, almost an exhibitionistic, act of recovery. They are inscribed, too, into the subject matter, and Dutt's treatment of it; Dutt's epic reworks an episode from the

Hindu epic, the Ramayana (which he'd heard from his mother as a child), except that, as we know, Dutt made the son of Ravana, the hero Rama's traditional adversary, the tragic protagonist of his poem. Dutt used the Miltonic inversion of *Paradise Lost* to make the transition from the certainties of a religious epic, and religion itself, to the ambivalences of a 'secular' work; 'I hate Rama and all his rabble,' said Dutt in another of his letters, speaking with the voice of an India that would find imaginative sustenance in its epics and religious texts while never literally engaging with their sacredness; literature, with Dutt, and for the sort of modernism he ushers in, doesn't quite become a substitute for religion, as it was for Arnold; it becomes, in its relationship with religion, a process of self-division, of qualified wonder, of aesthetic joy and a not-quite-rational anger and fear, of immersion and distancing, of open-armed welcoming and angry refutation. All these registers are audible in Dutt's meditations, in his letters, upon his 'enterprise'.

2. The 'Turn'

In 1862, after his epic poem had been published, Madhusudan Dutt left for England, registering at Gray's Inn to study law - to be joined there, later, by wife and children. Dutt's arrival in the land where he'd once wished to be recognised as an 'English' poet went unremarked; he was miserable and soon short of funds. He moved to Versailles; here, he concentrated his efforts to introduce the sonnet (which had, itself, once travelled from Italy to England) to Bengali literature, calling it the 'chaturdashpadi', which one might loosely translate as 'the fourteen-line stanza'.

The sonnet, used to express the sentiments of courtly love at its inception, had lent itself to troubled meditations and to ambivalent sexual registers with Shakespeare; later, the seemingly pacific Wordsworth

used it to propagate subliminally revolutionary messages. Yet the sonnet, even with Shakespeare, was a self-reflexive literary form; its subject, from the outset, had been itself. Dutt took the sonnet's self-reflexivity, and also its ability to address the political, and used them to play out, explicitly, the drama of disowning and recovery, of exile and homecoming, that had shaped both his life and his artistic choices.

One of his most celebrated sonnets is called 'Bangabhasha' ('The Bengali Language'); an earlier, equally well-known version of this poem, 'Kabi-Matribhasha' ('The Poet's Mother-Tongue'), is inserted into a letter written in English in late 1860 in Calcutta; it is probably his first attempt at the poem. Dutt says in the letter: 'I want to introduce the sonnet into our language and some mornings ago, made the following...' The poet begins 'Bangabhasha' with a complaint to his 'mother', Bengal, of the miseries of exile: 'O Bengal, there are many treasures in your keeping; -/Yet (fool that I am!), neglecting these,/Senseless with lust for others' possessions, I've travelled/To a foreign country...' (my translation).

The trope of exile (not unknown to Bengali devotional verse) is a prescient one: two years after the composition of the first version of this sonnet, Dutt would depart for England. In the ninth line, the addressee instructs her petitioner to return to the treasures hidden in his mother's, or motherland's, womb. 'Then, in a dream, the goddess of my lineage proclaimed./ "O child, your mother's womb is profuse with jewels,/Why then are you in this state of destitution?/Go back, ignorant one, go back to your home!"' The final couplet seals the issue; it records the poet's obedience to this directive, his withdrawal from the destitution of exile, and the discovery of those 'treasures', of which the principal one is his mother tongue: 'Happily I obeyed; in time I found/

The riches of my mother-tongue, in the great web of treasures.'

The simultaneously questioning and self-reflexive dimensions of the Shakespearean sonnet (a form which Dutt didn't always use) serves him well here. To make a brief comparison: in 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', Shakespeare, in the first eight lines, praises the beloved's beauty while noting, and querying, its transitoriness. The 'turn', the 'But' at the opening of the ninth line, or third quatrain, introduces us to the conviction that the poet's art, 'where in eternal lines to time thou growest', will preserve that mortal beauty from extinction. The final couplet encapsulates and summarises this argument; here, the sonnet self-reflexively praises its own, and language's, power to preserve and renew.

This Shakespearean structure, and the psychological movement it embodies, is employed, by Dutt, to dramatise the colonial, and post-colonial, movement from spiritual and geographical exile to cultural recovery. The general questions regarding exile and identity are posed in the first eight lines. Exile, distancing, or cultural disowning are represented implicitly by the probable location of the sonnet's revision, Versailles (Dutt was to write most of his sonnets in France); they are represented, generically, by the sonnet itself, which too is an exile and wanderer across cultures, although its incursion into the vernacular of a colonial culture was, till then, unprecedented. At the ninth line, the 'turn', the Shakespearean 'But', occurs as an interjection from the goddess, and the process of cultural recovery begins in the midst of exile; the 'turn' of the sonnet becomes a cultural and almost physical turning towards the mother tongue and one's indigenous antecedents. The concluding couplet, which completes the act of recovery by attesting to the poet's discovery of his language in the

'web of treasures', also confirms, in effect, that the sonnet is now an indigenous form; the self-reflexivity of the Shakespearean couplet is freighted, in Dutt, with an added colonial self-consciousness.

As if taking the goddess's imperative to heart, Dutt returned to India not long after. He did, though, take his exams at Gray's Inn, and came back to Calcutta a qualified barrister. Spiritual homecomings are all very well, especially when they lead to artistic voyages rather than actual ones; but real homecomings are a different matter. In Calcutta, Dutt practised, often controversially, at the High Court, lived extravagantly and beyond his means, and raced impatiently towards an untimely death. Both his and his wife's health worsened, although there were brief periods of convalescence. He died in 1874, at the age of 50, reportedly a few hours after his wife Henrietta did. He is buried at the Park Circus cemetery, one of his sonnets (addressed to a passer-by or itinerant), which he'd composed as his own epitaph, engraved on a plaque outside.

Editing the anthology of modern Indian writing, I discovered that the paradoxes played out in Dutt's relatively short life, and the trajectories and metaphors of exile and homecoming that define it, are patterns that repeat themselves in subsequent narratives of Indian modernity. Certainly, the lives of a substantial number of the major Indian writers of the twentieth century, and, significantly, the shape and arc of their work, appear to be structured around these patterns. Briefly consider, for instance, the life and works of the novelist, O.V. Vijayan, that hugely influential figure in Malayalam literature.

Vijayan was born in 1930 in Palghat, Kerala; his first novel, *Khasakkinte Itihasam* (The Legends of Khasak), published in 1969, roughly a hundred and seven years after Dutt's epic, is seen to represent a turning point in modern Malayalam literature. Based upon actual

experience, it tells the story of an educated, rationalist young man who arrives as a schoolteacher in an obscure South-Indian village in which time hasn't moved. An ambivalent but characteristic psychological movement is revealed to us; the young man, who had come from elsewhere to enlighten, finds himself unexpectedly touched and transformed by the existence of the village; not only is the protagonist transformed, but also the novel; what might have been a social realist fiction about conscience and duty becomes something else. Vijayan, who, like many young men in Kerala at the time, was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, tells us, several years after the novel was originally written, how it not only fictionalizes an episode in his life, but, as it were, enacts the pattern of disowning and recovery.

He recalls, in an Afterword to the English translation, the provenance of his novel; how, as a young college graduate who'd lost his job, he'd taken a job as a schoolteacher in Thasarak through 'a State scheme to send barefoot graduates to man single-teacher schools in backward villages.' He was, at the time, a member of the Communist Party, and had already published 'two long stories depicting imaginary peasant uprisings.' He now wanted to write a 'revolutionary' novel. Having grown up in the Palghat countryside himself, he was 'familiar with its landscape... and its hilarious dialects,' and believed that the character of the 'city-bred schoolmaster coming to the village' could be developed as the perfect 'pilgrim-revolutionary'.

The novel, then, was planned as a radical act of disowning of, or as a riposte to, the feudal, the oral, the indigenous. 'Looking back,' he says, 'I thank Providence, because I missed writing the "revolutionary" novel by a hair's breadth.' Two things changed the direction the novel might have taken. The first was a historical event, the killing of Imre Nagy in Hungary, leading to Vijayan's

disillusionment with Communism. The other was Vijayan's arrival at the village itself, an arrival which was augmented into a sort of spiritual homecoming; just as, in Dutt's sonnet, the neglected mother-tongue becomes the goddess who instructs and commands, the obscure village, in Vijayan's fiction, becomes instructor to the schoolteacher: 'The Stalinist claustrophobia melted away as though it had never existed. Ravi, my protagonist, liberation's germ-carrier, now came to the village and re-entered his enchanted childhood. He was no longer the teacher, in atonement he would learn. He would learn from the stupor of Khasak.'

One might also find in this narrative, as in Dutt's career, an implicit mirroring of the movement from the English language to the mother-tongue; for Vijayan, before he wrote his first novel in Malayalam, was a student of English literature, and has a Master's degree in English. And this, as it happens, is a movement that recurs in the lives and works of many of the most influential writers in the regional literatures of what we call 'modern India'; Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu), U.R. Anantha Murthy (Kannada), Mahashweta Devi (Bengali), Ambai (Tamil), to name only a handful of living contemporaries, have all been students, even teachers, of English literature. The cleaving of the tongue is symptomatic, again, of how disowning and recovery permeate and shape the creation of the vernacular – which, in our literary history, is a synonym for, rather than a counter to, the 'modernist' - sensibility.

3. An Inversion in the Pattern

Disowning, recovery; the cleaving of the tongue: U.R. Anantha Murthy's story of how he embarked upon his first work, the short novel *Samskara*, is, again, as in Dutt and Vijayan, a narrative of homecoming in the middle of exile, recovery in the midst of physical, and inward,

distancing: 'It was [sic] nearly a little more than twenty-five years ago that I wrote *Samskara*... I was in England as a student, and fatigued with speaking the English language most of the time. I needed to recover my mother-tongue, living in the midst of English... It all started when I went to see a Bergman film - *Seventh Seal* - with my teacher, the famous novelist and critic, Malcolm Bradbury. The film had no sub-titles. My incomplete comprehension of it started a vague stirring in me. I remember having told Dr Bradbury that a European has no living memory of the middle ages and hence constructs it through knowledge acquired in books. But for an Indian like me, centuries coexist as a living memory transmitted through oral conditions. This set me off to rewrite a story which I had originally written for a journal.'

Anantha Murthy returns to his room; behaves like one instructed; starts to rewrite the seminal fiction; the role of Dutt's 'goddess', the 'kulalakshmi' who visited the poet in Versailles, is played here, in Birmingham, by, oddly, a 'familiar compound ghost' of Bergman and Malcolm Bradbury.

This little story echoes an account of A.K. Ramunajan's. (Ramanujan was, we know, an important Indian-English poet; but it was also as a translator of ancient Tamil poetry that he made a profound impact on our idea of the relationship between English, the contemporary Indian self, and the 'little', non-classical traditions of Indian antiquity.)

Once more, in a foreign country - America, in this case - Ramanujan discovered the poems in ancient Tamil which he'd later translate: 'Even one's own tradition is not one's birthright; it has to be earned, repossessed... One comes face to face with it sometimes in faraway places, as I did... One chooses and translates a part of one's past to make it present to oneself and maybe to

others. In 1962, on one of my first Saturdays at the University of Chicago, I entered the basement stacks of the then Harper Library in search of an elementary grammar of Old Tamil, which I had never learned... As I searched... I came upon an early anthology of classical Tamil poems ... Here was a part of my language and culture, to which I had been an ignorant heir. Until then, I had only heard of the idiot in the Bible who had gone looking for a donkey and had happened upon a kingdom...'

Here's an almost mystical discovery made within 'secular' parameters, like Dutt's discovery of the 'grand mythology of [his] ancestors'. The language moves from the vocabulary of individual choice - 'earned', 'repossessed', 'one chooses' - to that of chance and grace - 'I came upon', 'happened upon'. Self-knowledge is connected to ignorance - 'which I had never learned', 'ignorant heir' - as it is by mystics. Again, there's an air of exhortation, of instruction, on the one hand, and supplication and surrender on the other; the 'kulalakshmi' who, in the time of modernity, seems to have appeared before Indian writers-to-be in what Dutt called 'paradesh', 'foreign lands', is here as well, in the Chicago basement; she is invisible but palpable. Dutt, I'd said earlier, introduced an element of theatre into Indian literary history; that element of theatre recurs in both the small dramas mentioned above. Locations are worth noting in these stories of discovery and inauguration - the dark theatre with the foreign film without subtitles; the stacks in the basement; the sense of excavation, of artificial night; a narrative of the subconscious to which I'll return later.

We've been talking about 'turns' - a turning towards, a turning away from. They occur in these authors' texts, in the break in Dutt's sonnet, in Vijayan's protagonist's mutation from teacher to disciple in the obscure village,

in the Brahmin hero's alienation from his caste and clan in *Samskara*; and they occur in the authors themselves, as protagonists in the literary history they're creating. Disowning and recovery give to our literary (and perhaps political and cultural) history a pattern as formal and passionate as that of a sonnet. Of this pattern, Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* presents a startling variation, even inversion, a turning away from the 'turn' itself, a conferring of new values to exile and to homecoming.

With Dutt originated the literary ambition of going outward, toward England and Europe; occasionally substituted, as in Vijayan, by a journey to a remote place. The journey seems to be followed by a crisis, a break, an epiphany, a spiritual homecoming to the mother-tongue. Chaudhuri muddled and complicated this sequence in all kinds of ways; and it's worth studying his career and his mental life for their remarkable continuities, and disjunctions, with Dutt's.

Although he didn't travel to England till he was 57 years old, Chaudhuri's whole life, till then, had, in a sense, been a preparation for that journey. By the time he made it, he'd already memorized the features of England and Europe from his reading, as he tells us in *A Passage to England* - '... my mind was not a clean slate... it was burdened with an enormous load of book-derived notions'. Entering England, he compared the authorized version of the England he already knew with the makeshift version that was presented to him: '[t]he famous chalk cliffs did not stand out glimmering and vast, as Matthew Arnold had described, but seemed like white creases between the blue-grey sheet of the Channel...' This predilection for attributing a veracity to text or word over 'actual' landscape or location is a habit of the colonial mind. It had been made famous by Wilde in 'The Decay of Lying': 'Where, if not from the

Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps...?’

By the time Chaudhuri made his journey, he was, of course, unlike Dutt, already famous in the language and country in which Dutt had aspired to make his name. The *Autobiography*, which was published in 1951, had received some very favourable reviews in the British press. The pattern I’ve been following takes on an intriguing shape with the writing of this book. Dutt had moved, about a hundred years ago, from the English language to the mother-tongue, thereby, in a sense, creating an avenue for Bengali literary culture, and Chaudhuri now reversed the direction. At the time of his writing the autobiography, and even long after, it was unusual, indeed exceptional, for a Bengali to embark upon a literary project, major or minor, in anything but his own tongue; at the time, the Bengali language was, for the Bengali writer, the legitimate vehicle for cosmopolitan, middle-class expression. But the cultural legacy of the putative but inescapable Bengal Renaissance, which was still coming into being when Dutt was writing, had obviously stratified sufficiently into a orthodoxy for Chaudhuri, born at its peak in 1897, and formed by it intellectually, to want to distance himself from it.

Chaudhuri had served a long apprenticeship as an ‘unknown Indian’ by the time he published his autobiography at the age of 54. Gravitating from a small town, Kishorganj, to Calcutta to read History at the Scottish Church College, he stood first in the B.A. exams in Calcutta University, probably then the colonial world’s premier institution of higher studies. As spectacularly, he proceeded to fail his M.A. He then took up a series of jobs; and, for a time, was secretary to the nationalist Sarat Bose. Yet he continued to feel uneasy with Indian

nationalism, and with the post-Independence Bengali, and Indian, middle class.

Besides, the Bengali *bhadralok* worshipped a good degree, but never forgave or forgot a bad one; it extolled professional success and berated lack of ambition. Chaudhuri evidently knew what it meant to be judged by these standards; in his Preface, he said: '... after passing the age of fifty I am faced with the compulsion to write off all the years I have lived and begin life anew. My friends say I am a failure; and I daresay they will now think I am trying to excuse that failure; I will not concede the point.' Dutt turned from English to Bengali with a similar refusal to accept failure; to leave behind him the rejection from Blackwood's Magazine, the uncharitable reviews in Calcutta in the Bengal Harkaru and the Hindu Intelligencer, his difficult European odyssey; Chaudhuri turned from Bengali, and, in effect, Bengalis, in order to compose an epic, a panoramic picture, of the Bengali sensibility. Neither his literary practice, his choice of language, nor his anti-nationalism can be seen in isolation; I see them, in fact, as unexpected, sometimes estranging, elaborations upon a pattern.

4. Talking to Oneself

All his life, Chaudhuri strove to both express his Bengaliness and to escape it; if his first act of distancing was to write his autobiography in the English language, his second act of distancing himself from his intellectual antecedents was his lapidary dedication itself, placed at the beginning of the book, which made him infamous in his own land: 'TO THE MEMORY OF THE/ BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA/ WHICH CONFERRED SUBJECTHOOD ON US/ BUT WITHHELD CITIZENSHIP;/ TO WHICH YET/ EVERY ONE OF US THREW OUT THE CHALLENGE:/ "CIVIS BRITANNICUS SUM"/ BECAUSE/ ALL THAT WAS

GOOD AND LIVING/ WITHIN US/ WAS MADE,
SHAPED AND QUICKENED/ BY THE SAME BRITISH
RULE'.

This twelve-line signpost of Indian literary history, announcing its striking act of disowning while proclaiming its embarrassing allegiance, is absent, however, from the 1999 Picador reissue of the *Autobiography*; handling the book, I couldn't understand why it felt incomplete, why I felt something was missing. When I realised, at last, what it was, I phoned the publisher, Peter Straus; he confessed to being as surprised as I was, and promised he'd investigate. Later, he told me the dedication had been lost somewhere in the course of the book's publishing history, and that Picador had inherited the text the way it had appeared from its former publishers. Straus reassured me, of course, that the dedication would be restored. Why the dedication disappeared at all is mysterious; certainly, one has no reason to believe that Chaudhuri disowned, at some point, his own act, and proclamation, of disowning. Was it, then, censored, or excised, by a well-meaning Western publisher?

The dedication itself is a curious artifact, curiously arranged. The eighth line consists of one word only – 'Because'; it serves as a sort of fulcrum around which the dedication turns; and as the 'turn' in Dutt's sonnet veers it towards the 'kulalakshmi', the goddess, and, finally, the mother-tongue, the 'because' here parodies the form and logic of the sonnet, and takes us in the opposite direction, 'All that was good and living/ Within us/ Was made, shaped and quickened/ By the same British rule'. The word 'Us' occurs three times in the dedication; it's used with deliberate, and provocative, irony. Who is the 'us', after all, that the author of the dedication claims kinship with? For the dedication, in fact, represents a permanent break with that 'us', a

relinquishing, by Chaudhuri, of his participation in the collectivities of post-Independence India. Seldom, I think, has the triumphalist collective pronoun been used in contemporary India with such lonely and perverse intent.

In choosing English, Chaudhuri was, of course, offering himself to a worldwide audience, if by 'world' we mean the Anglophone West. The 'unknown' in the title, thus, is also partly ironical, a slap in the face of a society which, he felt, had largely ignored him. When Dutt published his epic, the Bengali readership was relatively amorphous, itself a kind of transitional text. Dutt could write to his friend: 'Many Hindu ladies, I understand, are reading the book and crying over it.'

He could also relate to the same friend, Raj Narain, in another letter, an account of an evolving readership charged with subterfuge and wonder; it is a moment of theatre, the sort of theatre that permeates Dutt's life, the poet himself acting out his two selves, the self that disowns and the self that recovers, posing first as Anglophone philistine, then proudly declaiming his own poem in Bengali: 'Some days ago I had occasion to go to the Chinabazar. I saw a man seated in a shop and deeply poring over Meghanad. I stepped in and asked him what he was reading. He said in very good English; - 'I am reading a new poem, Sir!' 'A poem!' I said, 'I thought there was no poetry in your language'. He replied - 'Why, Sir, here is poetry that would make my nation proud.' I said, 'Well, read and let me know.' My literary shopkeeper looked hard at me and said, 'Sir, I am afraid you wouldn't understand this author.' I replied, 'Let me try my chance.' He read out of Book 11 that part wherein Kam returns to Rati... How beautifully the young fellow read... I took the poem from him and read out a few passages to the infinite astonishment of my new friend. How eagerly he asked

where I live? I gave him an evasive reply, for I hate to be bothered with visitors.'

The question of the 'audience', however, is a vexed one today for Indian writers in English, complicated by ideas of post-coloniality, appropriation, and authenticity: on a more banal level, it has become something of a nuisance. 'Which audience do you write for?' is a question asked indefatigably of Indian-English writers published in the West, its underlying presumption being that the only morally defensible answer is, 'For an Indian audience.' Such choices are hardly ever simply made or have a simple history; Chaudhuri's autobiography, written, by strategic and deliberate self-admission, for a Western readership, gives to the issue the complexity it deserves.

If English, for Chaudhuri, is the language by which he disowns Bengaliness, it's also his sole means for expressing it; it's probably these contrary and subconscious usages that give his formal language its unexpected tactility; every sentence in the book - in the poetry of its descriptions of the East-Bengali landscape, and its portrayal of Calcutta - is imbued with the Bengaliness it also implicitly rejects.

For Chaudhuri, recovery begins, indeed, in the midst of acting as interpreter to a non-Bengali, non-Indian audience. For instance, in his small prefatory note, Chaudhuri refers to Kishorganj as a 'little country town'; a page later, in the first sentence of the first chapter, he is already dismantling the canonical English and literary resonances of the phrase in order to convey a lived, but unacknowledged, reality. His description occurs, as we see, between two definitions, one disowned, the other recovered: 'Kishorganj, my birthplace, I have called a country town, but this description, I am afraid, will call up wholly wrong associations. The place had nothing of the English country town about it, if I am to judge by

the illustrations I have seen and the descriptions I have read...' What, then, is the Kishorganj he posits against the English phrase? It is something in-between, a colonial construct, like 'Bengaliness' itself: 'one among a score of collections of tin-and-mat huts or sheds, comprising courts, offices, schools, shops and residential dwellings, which British administration had raised up in the green and brown spaces of East Bengal.'

To embark upon the *Autobiography* in English was a solitary project. It was like being in an echo chamber, your ear peeled for your own voice. Dutt had had the 'literary shopkeeper' to read his poem to; Chaudhuri had himself. In an essay called 'My Hundredth Year', Chaudhuri recalls how, when he began to write his book, the act of composing involved a play of echoes (audible as well as literary ones) and a talking to oneself: 'I read what I had written aloud and then also read a passage from some great work of English prose in the same way. If the two sounds agreed I passed my writing.'

The reason for this, as Chaudhuri puts it, was 'an acute anxiety', a sense of dispossession, for 'I did not learn English from Englishmen, nor hear it as spoken by native speakers of the language till late in life.' Chaudhuri, like many of his generation and his background – I think, here, of my wife's paternal grandfather and my own father, about twenty years younger than Chaudhuri, and, like him, a graduate of Scottish Church College - learnt English as a second language. English prose style, in the hands of writers like Chaudhuri and Naipaul, has been an instrument of ambivalence; besides, neither of these two writers, among the most individual stylists of English prose from the 'colonies', came from the upper reaches of their respective societies.

On the other hand, Rushdie's 'khichdi' idiolect, with its 'Bombay mix' of Hindi, English, and Indian English, is a hegemonic language; the increased use of a similar

English in films and advertisements ('Britannia khao/ World Cup jao') signals the coming of age and the spending power of an upper-middle class generation in post-Independence, post-liberalization India. This is not to either praise or condemn it, but to point out that, in order to appreciate its comedy and excitement, it's important to remember that this 'khichdi' language is very far from an African creole or pidgin, or being a language of the dispossessed.

On the other hand, English prose style, in Chaudhuri's hands, becomes the measure of one who doesn't quite belong. It's partly a language of suggestion, which is why sound and rhythm are such significant components of it. Chaudhuri, notoriously, believed in opinions and positions; but he believed (this is worth remembering) equally in the prosody of the English sentence: 'There is no such thing as one standard rhythm of English prose. English prose rhythms are bewilderingly diverse...' There's a greater tension between sense and sound, between the different registers, audible and half-heard, of what Chaudhuri says, than either his readers or even he has given himself credit for. The auditoriness of English prose style becomes, for this astonishing and intractable writer, a mapping of an area between control and dispossession, between the authority of words and the suggestion of sound.

5. Postscript

My purpose in describing the pattern of disowning and recovery in the lives and works of certain writers – Madhusudan Dutt; Vijayan; Ramanujan; Anantha Murthy; Nirad Chaudhuri – is to propose an alternative story of modernity and modernism; to distinguish it from both European modernism and the narrative of post-coloniality.

The difference between the story of this modernism,

and the more famous one that unfolds itself in Europe from the early twentieth century onwards, has to do, it seems, with the invention of the past and the artist's relationship to it. For the European and, especially, the American-born modernist, the past is threatened by the banality and the violence of the present: by popular culture; by the machine; by the venality of the marketplace, for which, often, Jewry is a figure; by the Great War. The European past returns, or is recuperated, in fragments, in the works of, say, Pound, or Eliot, or David Jones; it can no longer be inhabited, or made available, in its entirety. It's not surprising, as we now know, to find this powerful nostalgia for 'high' European civilization in Fascism, or that Western modernism had emotional ties and a certain sympathy with the latter. The volkisch philosophy of an Oswald Spengler, according to which cultures are essential, untranslatable, and rooted, plant-like, to a particular soil or habitat, finds its artistic counterpart in the great works of modernism, in which the European past is threatened, fragmented, but nevertheless organically and indispensably present.

The story of 'our' – if I can presume to use that pronoun – modernity is somewhat different. Firstly, as colonials, our idea of 'high' culture lay elsewhere. 'Our' past, in spite of its apotheosis by Orientalist scholars, was viewed with a degree of objectivity, ambivalence, even, occasionally, loathing. It was this past that, once neglected or rejected, presented itself to the artist – to Dutt, for example – with its renewing creative possibilities. A conspiracy of chance and circumstances brought about this renewal; and the source of the renewal appears to be often random and paradoxical. In Dutt's case, it was Milton and Versailles; for Vijayan, the death of Imre Nagy and the journey to a village; for Anantha Murthy, a Bergman film without subtitles; for Ramanujan, a basement in Chicago. Very few seem to have turned to a

past that they didn't feel they'd once neglected; and very few seem to have encountered it in expected circumstances, or an expected place or shrine. Even Debendranath Tagore, whose epiphanic meeting with his spiritual heritage involves a more conventionally acceptable source, a page from the Upanishads, came upon the page accidentally, as it was being blown away by a breeze.

To take another example: Satyajit Ray. Here was a man born into a Brahmo family, whose enthusiasms, as he was growing up, were Western classical music and Hollywood movies, particularly John Ford's. A combination of roughly three events appears to have caused the 'turn' towards local landscape, the Bengali language, and the past that we find in Ray's first film – his discovery of Italian neo-realist cinema; Jean Renoir's visit to Calcutta; and a commission to illustrate an abridged version of *Pather Panchali*, which he hadn't read before. Indian modernism's (if I can call it that) relationship to the autochthonic past is comparable, in some ways, to European modernism's relationship to the industrialized present; in that its provenance is surreptitious, and the hint of illegality in the relationship makes it the more compelling.

The randomness of situations that lead to that 'turn' speaks less of an ideological move than of associations formed suddenly in the subconscious; indeed, this aleatory quality rearranges the purposes, the telos, of colonialism and nationalism. What else but the subconscious can make Milton, Imre Nagy, The Seventh Seal, Mozart, the Ramayana, Nischindipur, Basavanna, Kerala, Chicago, Calcutta, France, not seem like delirious babbling, but part of a single literary history? And it's the dimension of the subconscious that distinguishes this tale of modernity from the narrative of post-coloniality.

In the latter, a confrontation takes place between

Empire and local culture; English and indigenous forms of knowledge; colonizer and colonized. But in the story I've told, the battle, the struggle, takes place within the self, and not just between the self and an enemy outside it; the story of modernity is as much a story of self-division as the post-colonial narrative is one of Empire, domination, and resistance. In the narrative of post-coloniality, the mother-tongue, 'Indianness', or 'Bengaliness' are natural properties of the colonized, threatened by the processes of Empire. In the story of modernity, the mother-tongue and the English language are part of a transaction that, through disowning and recovery, define the 'modern' self; the transaction is modulated from artist to artist, from moment to moment, and takes a radically new, but provisional, form in the work of the Anglophone writer – but it's precisely this inward tension that both enables and disfigures creativity in the life and career of the Indian 'modern'.

For me, this extraordinary tale takes about a hundred and twenty years to unfold, and, in literature at least, it comes to an end circa 1981, with the publication of *Midnight's Children*. Here is the classic post-modern Indian text, and I name it thus not only because it possesses all the recognizable window-dressing of post-modernity: polyphony; the conflation and confusion of fantasy with history. In Rushdie's novel, the tension between rejection and recuperation which gave the modernist Indian literary text its inexhaustible light and shade is replaced by something new: a promiscuity of meaning. Nothing is either disowned or recovered; all is embraced. The inward struggle that, from Dutt to Ramanujan, gave Indian modernism its particular meaning, is replaced, in *Midnight's Children*, by infinite play.

And yet I don't think the modernist paradigm I've described is altogether dead. Its residues perhaps survive

even now; and, although I'm fifteen years younger than Rushdie, I think that my artistic practice has been informed and shaped by that older, residual pattern. This is probably true of other writers among my contemporaries, but I'll restrict myself to a personal retelling. The 'turn' in my life occurred around 1978; and though it didn't have anything to do, directly, with my apprenticeship as a writer, it had everything to do with my creative life. The 'turn' took place in my relationship to an art that was, for me, extremely important but still secondary at the time: music. One fine day, almost, I became a lifelong student, and then exponent, of Hindustani classical music.

Nothing had prepared either my family, or myself, or my friends for that 'turn'. My father belonged to the upper reaches of the Bombay corporate world; that was the desert island I grew up on. My mother was, and is, primarily a singer of Tagore-songs; and the genteel, hybrid, Tagorean world of the *bhadralok* has always kept classical music, with its zamindars, ustads, and tawaifs, at arm's length. (The associations of Western classical music were, for the European bourgeoisie, unambiguously 'high' cultural; the hostility it provokes is a hostility towards elitism. For the Indian, especially the Bengali, middle class, on the other hand, Hindustani classical music always had the air, at once, of profundity, intricacy, and disrepute.)

When the 'turn' came, however, it was complete and seemingly final. Prior to it, I dallied, unsurprisingly for one who'd grown up in Bombay, with American folk, blues, and rock music; played the acoustic and electric guitars; even composed songs. Almost overnight, I set aside my guitars; calluses gradually grew on the fingertips that, six months ago, had borne the deep, embedded lines of frets and strings. I stopped listening to my huge record collection; it was only recently, after about twenty

two years, that I once more began to play, with extraordinary shyness, my Joni Mitchells and James Taylors. In 1980, what I had was a sort of theological conversion; I decided that the music I'd listened to and sung so far was out of joint with the world around me, with 'India', its seasons, its times of day; only the raags of the tradition I now embarked upon were appropriate and apposite to that reality. In fact, Western popular music fitted in with Bombay, and the scene I saw from my balcony – the Marine Drive, the Queen's Necklace, Chowpatty Beach, the nocturnal lights and incandescent messages of the city – rather comfortably; but it was as if, in pursuing Hindustani classical music, I was assigning new values to reality – to light, to air, to evening, to morning.

When I look back to Dutt and the one hundred and fifty years of our cultural history, what happened in my life, and the suddenness with which it happened, the radical break it constituted, seem no longer surprising; indeed, they fit in quite well with the pattern of disowning and recovery through which the nation, the self, experience, and creativity have made themselves available to us in modernity. You turn to a language that seems the only language adequate to your altered vision of reality, and of yourself; heretofore neglected, this becomes the authentic language of nationhood, experience, self-consciousness. In the poets and writers I've mentioned, the mother-tongue was thus constructed; in my case, that 'Indian' language was Hindustani classical music. I've begun, once more, as I said, to listen to my old records; but the calluses on my fingers healed so completely that I don't think I will touch the guitar again.

THE DA VINCI CODE : DECODING DAN BROWN'S FICTION AND RON HOWARD'S FILM

SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

Keywords : *myth, metaphor, hoax, hyperreal, cult object, ideology*

The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven. (312)

"Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene" (334)

"Authors...Even the sane ones are nuts" (385)

"...Every faith in the world is based on fabrication" (452)

Fact, Fiction and Film

In 2006, an invitation to be one of the panelists at a discussion session held in a prestigious local bookstore, gave me the opportunity of watching Ron Howard's film

on the very first day of its release in India, as well as re-read Dan Brown's book, initially presented to me by one of my students. My erstwhile student was very serious about not allowing me to remain ignorant about a book that had sold over 50 million copies.

The Indian Censor Board went through the exercise of pre-viewing the film before it was given permission to be released nationwide. The State governments of Punjab and Goa and five others including neighbouring Pakistan banned it from being screened in their sensitive locations. But one must admit that those who watched the *controversial* film must have found it quite staid in comparison with the printed text, which of course can be regarded as a programmatic myth buster that combines inspiration, information and creative imagination. Readers will recall the banning of both the book and film *The Last Temptation of Christ* that created a great furore, some years back. The novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, written by the Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis was published in 1952. Years later, amidst worldwide protests the film version was released in the USA on August 12, 1988. Martin Scorsese directed the film version. It was not released in India, as far as I know.

In Ron Howard's film version of *The Da Vinci Code*, Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon seemed as if he was quite bored with his role as a Harvard Professor of Symbolology while Sophie Neveu, played by Audrey Tautou- "I am Agent Neveu from DCPJ's Cryptology Department" remains a diligent student and a willing auditor, as she is systematically "educated" about the secret history of Christianity and the invidious agenda of the Roman Catholic sect. The romantic-realist, Dan Brown ultimately tells the readers that Sophie is not just the so-called grand daughter of the Grandmaster of the Priory of Sion but the sole surviving descendant of Jesus Christ. But then if Sophie is much more than an officer with the French

police, Robert Langdon is a formidable Harvard University professor, who we meet in the film version as having a great fan following as he is seen launching and signing glossy hardcover copies of his book *"The Sacred Feminine"*. In the real world though we know that Harvard University has yet to create a Dept of Symbology. That indeed is the first fictional figment that Dan Brown insinuates into his very compelling text with all the adroit skill of a consummate spinner of yarns.

The Internet is swamped with web pages that either support or dismiss Dan Brown's "fictional" code as being either revelatory or irresponsible, opinions varying according to the ideology of the commentators, as they critique the history of Christianity and its suppression of 'the sacred feminine'. The book openly accuses the Christian church about systematically suppressing the "facts" about Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene and the "fact" that they had a child together, born posthumously, after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus is re-presented as a social reformer and a visionary and His divine status is interrogated in Brown's narrative, a paradigm shift in terms of deification and unquestioned faith in divine powers. In some religions a narrative like Dan Brown's may have met with more severe criticism and he could have even received threats to his life for blasphemy.

'History and hoax are a function of narrative'

It is in this regard that we step into the contested and confrontational terrain with countless fault-lines about the claims of truth, claims of history as truth, the unreliability of the historical narrative, the dubious and debatable origins of factual information and fictional inspiration. In one of his essays Bill Ashcroft, the post-colonial theorist, had questioned the ambiguity of truth and had observed,

"...truth and lie, history and hoax are a function of narrative. Both gain life by the stories told about them. The stories that survive as truth are the stories that best convince their audience (Ashcroft 38)

But what we may perhaps like to remind ourselves as readers is Roland Barthes' definition of the *referential illusion* and *reality effect*, reading the past as history, historical fact being implicated in interpretation, the ambivalence and ambiguity of historical narratives which are quite often deeply subjective and problematised. This debate about historiographic narratives is further intensified when film narratives are critiqued. The unreliability of visual texts has been interrogated famously by Jean Baudrillard in his seminal essay on the environment of simulacra and simulations, for he categorically states, referring to the distinction between historical myth and the myth created by the cinema, asserting that the mediation of history into cinema and vice versa has resulted in a double destruction-

Because cinema itself contributed to the disappearance of history, and to the advent of the archive. Photography and cinema contributed in large part to the secularization of history to fixing it in its visible "objective" form at the expense of the myths that once traversed it...Today cinema can place all its talent, all its technology in the service of reanimating what it itself contributed to liquidating. It only liquidates ghosts, and in itself is lost therein." (Baudrillard 48)

Moreover, Jean Baudrillard categorically accuses the cinema for destroying the real and the imaginary, history and fiction through its projections of cinematic myth as real and thereby producing the hyperreal-

Concurrently with this effort toward an absolute correspondence with the real, cinema also approaches an absolute correspondence with itself- and this is not contradictory...it is the very definition of the hyperreal. Hypotyposis and specularity. Cinema plagiarizes itself, recopies itself, remakes its classics, retroactivates its original myths, remakes the silent film more perfectly than the original, etc all of this is logical, *the cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent.*

(Baudrillard 47)

Dan Brown's Ideology

I want to draw the readers' attention to pages 452-453 of Dan Brown's 604 page romantic thriller. These pages indicate that the novel is a result of Brown's ideology, not Brown's iconoclasm. Brown's intention is stated in obvious and crystal clear terms and implanted in the text without ambiguity and I feel it is necessary to quote at some length what may be regarded as Brown's transparent agenda-

...every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith- acceptance of that we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove. Every religion describes God through metaphor, allegory and exaggeration, from the early Europeans to the modern Sunday school. Metaphors are a way to help our minds process the unprocessable. The problems arise when we begin to believe literally in our own metaphors.

(452-453)

In true professorial style Langdon continues to impress

upon Sophie the importance of recognizing the bedrock of religious faith-

The Bible represents a fundamental guidepost for millions of people on the planet, in much the same way the Koran, Torah and Pali Canon offer guidance to people of other religions. If you and I could dig up documentation that contradicted the holy stories of Islamic belief, Judaic belief, Buddhist belief, pagan belief, should we do that? Should we have a flag and tell the Buddhists that we have proof the Buddha did not come from a lotus blossom? Or that Jesus was not born of a *literal* virgin birth? Those who truly understand their faiths understand the stories are metaphorical..." (453)

Langdon then adds conclusively, "Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people. (453)

If readers miss these prescriptive statements about the use of metaphors in order to create the mythic, then the myopic brouhaha is inevitable and the deafening decibels of accusations about distorting history merely indicate that we have failed to decode the fictional text simply because we are not careful readers. Dan Brown states in absolute lucid terms that if metaphors are believed as literal facts, then problems are bound to arise.

The film version does begin with the caveat that- *the mind sees what it chooses to see*. That is the filmmaker Ron Howard's code, and with this one-liner he distances himself and his film version from possible controversy. Dan Brown coaxes the willing suspension of disbelief, three years later Ron Howard's Hollywood version creates world-wide media hype that sends all scurrying back to re-read the book as well as view the film, and many

would agree a lot is lost in translation from the printed text to the visual text.

Film or Novel as Cult Object

The problem why the film version fails to reach the cult status that the book does, is that the movie does not implicate any defining moments in its narrative that lingers in the mind long after the causal relationships in the film are forgotten. Umberto Eco explains very well how a book or film can become a cult object, a palimpsest text, or an intellectual onion that can be peeled ad infinitum to discover its lasting appeal. So Eco begins with a rhetorical question in his definition of a cultural product reaching cult status and emphasizes that the book or film must have "archetypal appeal" so that characters and place names become mystified. The mythification of the contemporary is done with such skill that they become "catalyzers of collective memories" (Eco 395) Therefore, Eco explains in pedagogic terms,

what are the requirements for transforming a book or a movie into a cult object? The work must be loved, obviously, but that is not enough...I think in order to transform a work These two pages enshrine Dan Brown's code, his essential agenda, it can be called into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole. In the case of a book one can unhinge it, so to speak, physically, reducing it to a series of excerpts. A movie on the contrary must be already ramshackle, rickety, unhinged in itself. A perfect movie, since it cannot be reread everytime we want, from the point we choose, as happens with a book, remains in our memory as a whole, in the form of a central idea or

emotion; only an unhinged movie survives as a disconnected series of images, of peaks, of visual icebergs. It should display not one central idea but many. It should display not one central idea but many. It should not reveal a coherent philosophy of composition. It must live on, and because of, its glorious ricketyness. (Eco 395)

However, these excerpts are from Eco's widely known essay "Casablanca: Cult Movies and intertextual collage" first published in 1984. In 2007, the essay may seem to have lost some of its relevance with the technological breakthrough that happened in the nineties leading to the emergence of home VCR and DVD libraries as part of bourgeois culture. So in many cases perhaps, viewing and re-viewing a film is as possible as reading and re-reading a book.

Source and Resource

Dan Brown skillfully weaves myth and mystique into his contemporary fictional format thereby collapsing time, space, character, creating archetypes that are simultaneously transcendent and topical. But then we should not forget that Dan Brown's thesis or assertions are not so unique after all. Most of the "sacrilegious" ideas can be located in the following previously published texts that Dan Brown even quotes from and the titles of his source books are mentioned in Dan Brown's web page-

- *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln
- *The Messianic Legacy* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln
- *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh

- *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* by Margaret Starbird
- *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail* by Margaret Starbird
- *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince
- *Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians* by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy
- *When God Was a Woman* by Merlin Stone
- *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* by Riane Eisler

If Brown had been writing a book of criticism then of course it would have been almost mandatory for him to mention his sources in the Reference page generally located in the last few pages of a dissertation or academic article. In a mystery thriller however, such a page would have been construed as odd and superfluous, though the claims of the FACT page which can be read as the Epigraph of the book, have been challenged and deconstructed *ad nauseum* by now, as a quick Google search will prove. This brings us back to the fact that stories however 'unreliable' as they are fashionably described now, linger longer in the memory and create a long-standing impression. As Aldous Huxley had once stated in a Paris Review interview,

I think that fiction and, as I say, history and biography are immensely important, not only for their own sake, because they provide a picture of life now and of life in the past, but also as vehicles for the expression of general philosophic ideas, religious ideas, social ideas. My goodness, Dostoevsky is six times as profound as Kierkegaard, because he writes fiction. In Kierkegaard you have this Abstract Man going on and on- like Coleridge —

why, it's nothing compared with the really profound Fictional Man, who has always to keep these tremendous ideas alive in a concrete form. In fiction you have the reconciliation of the absolute and the relative, so to speak, the expression of the general in the particular. And this, it seems to me, is the exciting thing-both in life and in art.

(Huxley 142)

However, if a skilful fictionist can blend theological visual art and architecture into his fictional narrative, and thereby interpret the mystery of existent concrete signs and symbols which anyone can scrutinize even in the 21st century, then the impact created can have an overwhelming resonance. Whether the result of the impression is positive or negative, we have to leave that to individual reader/viewer response. The way we read or see is complicated, as our readings or viewing is mediated with the implications of our ideologies and creative ideas, our belief systems and our culture, detached objectivity therefore though desirable is not always possible.

As an ex-Chairperson of the Commonwealth Writers Prize, having served on the jury panel for 3 years from 2003-2005, and having gone through around 300 books published in the last 3 years, I can state quite categorically is that though the Commonwealth writers prize jury panel would have admired the zest and gusto of *The Da Vinci Code* that has sold over 50 million copies- we most certainly could not have given it the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book. Let me however hasten to add that the book would not have been entered for this particular prize, as eligibility for entry is based on Commonwealth citizenship and Dan Brown is evidently an American citizen. As a university professor of literature I can venture to add that in most likelihood Dan Brown's

book would not be considered for inclusion in Calcutta University's undergraduate and postgraduate syllabi unless of course we created a new option, say, *Popular Fiction*. Right now such an option does not exist in the Dept of English, Calcutta University as the Dept of Symbolology does not exist in Harvard University, as far as I know.

Outcome

The positive result of the book has been the return of the Christians to the Church and Christianity as interested students rather than faithful followers. Dan Brown's book has effectively created an atmosphere that has led to complacent and indifferent Christians re-discovering the Bible, reading and comparing the Old Testament and the New Testament, even looking for clues that may have slipped Dan Brown's attention. Readers have been known to browse through the Theology archives of old libraries, seen re-visiting and re-discovering forgotten churches, noticing church architecture, the pagan symbols in churches and becoming engaged in learning about Christianity itself for which the of course the Christian clergy, Opus Dei, the Vatican the Pope should feel immensely pleased.

The curator of the Louvre as well as art historians should also be pleased, with all the attention to Leonardo Da Vinci whose name inspires the title of the book. Though again, not quite unexpectedly a Discovery channel programme categorically dismissed Dan Brown's claim that vinegar could destroy a sheet of papyrus as scientifically untenable. Therefore, all the tension about the *cryptex* or the Priory keystone, presumably first designed by Leonardo for storing secret documents is just a brilliant creation of myth and mystique. Students of literature would be delighted to see the reference to Alexander Pope in one of the many coded verses and

riddles that make intriguing reading, contributing remarkably to the suspense of this information-packed romantic thriller that often deviates from traditional notions. Dan Brown's imagination runs riot as he states that along with Issac Newton and others Walt Disney too was a Priory affiliate, who had coded messages inserted in his creations including his animation films such as *The Little Mermaid*. Also, Dan Brown tells his readers that throughout his life, Disney had been hailed as 'the Modern-Day Leonardo da Vinci'. (349)

As a matter of fact one can venture to suggest that what priests could not do, this American author has done effectively- Dan Brown has sent both Christians and non-Christians on the Da Vinci Code Trail or even generated a 21st century quest of the Holy Grail. This book has brought about a very cultural and secular sense of global togetherness and triggered a cultural discovery tour and secular pilgrimage. No wonder the pseudonym of one of the key characters who seems to be the principal myth-buster is titled quite appropriately- *teacher*. The Internet tells us tourists are flocking the Louvre, Westminster Abbey, Templar church in London, Rosslyn church in Edinburgh, Scotland. It reminds me of the time Stirling Castle became a must-see destination soon after the release of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*.

The greatest romance of the book lies in the ultimate fabrication that Sophie ultimately is the last surviving descendant of Jesus Christ. The education of Sophie is Teacher Brown's way of sensitizing young adults of Sophie's age group about their religious and cultural heritage, who are coaxed into re-discovering the formidable presence of centuries of Christian archival material as well as the churches, cathedrals and art museums etc that have their own stories to tell. Also, Dan Brown's book is very democratic as it is very sensitive about the possible ignorance of average readers while at

times it is simultaneously sensitive about the demands of the intellectually sophisticated readers. This style of explication is very unlike say James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Camus's *Plague* or Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, among many others, which are all eminently prize worthy timeless texts but at the same time are considered to be too daunting an engagement for an average reader.

The book has contributed to the rise in numbers of tourists visiting France, Italy, London and Edinburgh. Actually, I was a bit surprised that Dan Brown did not include America's participation in the Grail quest, apart from the reference to the Opus Dei headquarters in New York, and of course the American knight on the Grail trail- Prof Robert Langdon. Dan Brown could have included a sequence about the Pilgrim Fathers landing on the East Coast, finding a relic in one of the churches in Virginia or even Boston, closer to Robert Langdon's university-Harvard. But Brown's web home page does tell us that the next book will include America-Washington DC in particular- shall we try to decode that? In one superb sleight of the creative hand Dan Brown will bring together almost the entire white Christian majority sections of the Northern Hemisphere.

However the repulsion towards the albino Roman Catholic Silas, besotted and brainwashed by doctrinal injections seems strange. The repulsion of the white skinned towards the very white skinned, that is the albinos, as ghastly and ghostly, reminded me of Melville's description of the white whale- Moby Dick. Non-white races are quite conspicuously absent in this book. Other races and other skin colours do not enter Dan Brown's book as even guards, ushers, drivers or even killers. The many European languages used by the whites of course can pose a problem in communication. The film version has a series of dialogue in French, but English sub-titles are provided meticulously.

Also, though the film closely follows the book, which recently made a reviewer suggest to the prospective viewer that is better to watch the movie in the company of someone who has read the book, or else decoding the film may become somewhat mind-boggling. This forearming maybe needed for those who are unaware about any aspect of Christianity apart from the fact that December 25th is observed as an international holiday in celebration of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ. The end of the film deviates from the book and the suggestion of a possible romance between Sophie and Robert is significantly avoided. But in the film the scene where Sophie dips her high-heeled foot into a pool and remarks that she may do better maybe when she has had wine, illustrates a flicker of Ron Howard's ironic humour.

Of course, the greatest positive result of the book is that it has coaxed and seduced readers throughout the world to read a book of 605 pages. A success not unlike Rowling's who brought "story books" back into the hands of schoolchildren obsessed with video games and other techno diversions. Dan Brown's readers also tell us what contemporary readers are looking for in fiction. I searched the web and came up with the following among many other such assertions that Dan Brown has very effectively brought "esoterica" into the "mainstream". According to *USA Today*, "*Code*'s popularity shows that 'readers are clamoring for books which combine historic fact with a contemporary story line,' Carol Fitzgerald, president of *Bookreporter.com* records: 'They say, "I like being able to learn something as well as read a story".'" *USA Today* also noted at least 90 related books on religion, history and art, have seen sales rise as well.

Dan Brown's own family probably has contributed indirectly to the making of the book. Son of an award winning professor of mathematics and a professional sacred musician and married to an art history buff and

painter, Dan Brown's immediate family seem to be an in-house research centre, where dialogue can be an incessant and continuous investigative process unsullied by pride and prejudice.

Though Brown may have internalized some of the main arguments of this thriller, the Acknowledgements in the book bear evidence of his wide research-

For their generous assistance in the research of this book, I would like to acknowledge the Louvre Museum, the French Ministry of Culture, Project Gutenberg, Bibliothèque Nationale, the Gnostic Society Library, the Department of Paintings Study and Documentation Service at the Louvre, Catholic World News, Royal Observatory Greenwich, London Record Society, the Muniment Collection at Westminster Abbey, John Pike and the Federation of American Scientists, and the five members of Opus Dei (three active, two former) who recounted their stories, both positive and negative, regarding their experiences inside Opus Dei.

Decoding *The Da Vinci Code* is a rich learning experience for it quite unprecedented for a thriller to seduce its readers to become students of European history, politics, church history and theological debates.

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- On the Knights Templar: www.newadvent.org/cathen/14493a.htm
- On Opus Dei: <http://www.opusdei.org/>
- Dan Brown's home page: <http://www.danbrown.com/>

I conclude with three very significant excerpts from Dan Brown's FAQ web page that interested readers may wish to decode-

How Much of This Novel is True?

The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist (for example, Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings, the Gnostic Gospels, Hieros Gamos, etc.). These real elements are interpreted and debated by fictional characters. While it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit, each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations. My hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history.

Is This Book Anti-Christian?

No. This book is not anti-anything. It's a novel. I wrote this story in an effort to explore certain aspects of Christian history that interest me. The vast majority of devout Christians understand this fact and consider *The Da Vinci Code* an entertaining story that promotes spiritual discussion and debate. Even so, a small but vocal group of individuals has proclaimed the story dangerous, heretical, and anti-Christian. While I regret having offended those individuals, I should mention that priests, nuns, and clergy contact me all the time to thank me for writing the novel. Many church officials are celebrating *The Da Vinci Code* because it has sparked renewed interest in important topics of faith and Christian history. It is important to remember that a reader does not have to agree with every word in the novel to use the book as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith.

Are You a Christian?

Yes. Interestingly, if you ask three people what it means to be Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as absolute historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum,

and we each fall on that line where we may. By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious—that is, that we are all trying to decipher life's big mysteries, and we're each following our own paths of enlightenment. I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a life-long work in progress.

FLOWERING OF THE POISON TREE¹

NABANEETA DEV SEN

"Rama Katha Sudha Madhuri" is how Molla, a 16th century Telugu woman poet describes her retelling of the *Ramayana*. Ranganayakamma, a 20th century Telugu woman, calls her prose retelling of the *Ramayana*, *Ramayana Vishavruksham*. In four hundred years, from one woman writer to another, we have moved from a taste of honey and nectar to a taste of poison.

Here is a contemporary urban woman, a self-proclaimed marxist feminist, rewriting the Rama tale in a three volume magnum opus— from a locality not too far from where Molla wrote her *kavya*. She was recasting her *Ramayana* in the classical mould, announcing the purifying and wish fulfilling powers of the holy tale, thus preparing it for the royal court., whereas Ranganayakamma is critiquing the *Ramayana* as an unholy, undesirable, and degenerating cultural influence

upon the nation. It is the classical *Valmiki Ramayana* text that she has trained her guns on, the same one that Molla followed so discreetly in her retelling.

Here we have two women retelling the *Ramayana*, but not necessarily in a female voice. Ranganayakamma's voice is, in fact, a male voice, like Molla's, though presenting a completely different point of view. Chandrabati, the 16th century Bengali woman poet, a contemporary of Molla's, who tried to give an identity to the collective women's voice in her *Ramayana*, is in a way closer to Ranganayakamma, as she does not proclaim the *Ramayana* to be honey and nectar. In fact in the third book while describing Rama's insane jealousy of Ravana and suspicion about his innocent wife, she writes : "Poison fruit of the poison creeper, seeds of the poison tree." (*Bish-latar bish-phal go, bish-brikhkhher beej.*) She finds in Rama deadly flaws and makes him responsible for the fall of his dynasty and his kingdom, and for the abject suffering of his subjects. It is not the picture of an ideal kingdom, *Ramarajya*, as painted by Molla. It is not the court that she is addressing, her audience is meant to be made of women alone. She addresses them as "*Shuno sakhijan*".

If we listened to the collective voice of the rural women of India singing the Rama tale, we would not get a taste of honey, really, but of salt, a taste of tears. The rural women of the sub-continent, no matter where they are, which language they speak, express the same experience through their Rama-songs, they are all sisters in sorrow. Chandrabati adjust was talking to them.

But Molla was not. She didn't follow the female oral tradition but used the mainstream classical tradition, borrowing the male voice to prove her worth as a court-poet. Sita was not her concern but Rama. She was praising Rama and the *Ramayana*, accepting the classical literary mould as well as the morals that come with it.

The *Ramayana*, in her poem, is a miracle-working, purifying, wish-fulfilling agent of divine goodness. She had her own reasons for doing it, she wanted to join the galaxy of classical Sanskrit poets and had to follow the conventions to qualify. A woman, and a shudra at that, for Molla, exploiting the brahminical tradition to the hilt was in itself an act of subversion. The court brahmins, however, did not allow her poem to be read at the royal court in spite of its excellence because of her gender and her caste.

In the same language, Telugu, four centuries later, we encounter Ranganayakamma, with her harsh, satirical retelling of the *Ramayana*, in *Ramayana Vishavriksham*. She, too, is *not* one of the sisters in sorrow. Her urban voice is angry, and is not meant especially for women. She explains the social evils propagated by the myth of Rama and how it can continue to harm the morals of the country by spreading the wrong values among its citizens. Like Molla, it is Rama and what he stands for, that she is interested in, not Sita. She opposes Molla's classical traditional approach, and gives a strong critique of the *Ramayana*, what was partially stated by Chandrabati in the 16th century. The criticism that runs beneath the surface of the rural women's songs is understated, not strongly articulated, because they do not have the authority to criticise Rama and his power structure. They do not dare to borrow the male voice, which Molla did in her classical style, and Chandrabati did in her rude comments as the narrator, and again Ranganayakamma does in her political interpretation of the epic.

A self educated rural woman married after her school final examinations, Ranganayakamma left her husband and her home with her sons, came to the city on her own, became a writer and a fearless social and intellectual rebel, and an ardent marxist feminist. She

had acquired all the tools that allow her to use the male voice. Hence *Ramayana Vishavruksham* goes on to expound the epic's dangerous influences on society through a very interesting original retelling, which turns out to be a provocative collection of many genres of literary writing, combining fiction with socio-political discourse in separate sections. Literary criticism of an epic grows into the criticism of a whole system of values, attacking not merely Rama or the *Ramayana*, but the ideology behind it.

By a close reading of the text she shows that the *Ramayana* was a manifesto of the feudal -brahminical social system, one that exploited but excluded the weak from the public sphere, viz., the women, the lower castes, and the tribals. There was no space allotted for them in the warrior-priest power-nexus that thrived between the king and the sages. The women therefore sing of their sorrows among themselves within their private space, in the allocated voice. Lamentation is allowed to them, and experiences of personal feelings, but criticism of the system is not their job. No wonder when the shudras and the tribals sing their *Ramayanas*, they echo the women's voice.

Let us take a quick look at the tribal *Ramayanas*. They too, like the women, have chosen Sita, the left over of the *Ramayana* myth, to express themselves, avoiding the glory of the kings— Dasaratha and Rama. They identify with the disempowered, some even claim their origins from Ravana— the vanquished hero— defeated in an unfair battle. Very few of the tribals have a complete *Ramayana*, usually they sing fragmented songs, like the women do— when they have a connected, complete *Ramayana* as the Karbis of the North East region claim to have, they call it *the Song of Sita* unabashedly. Like the women of the mainstream culture, the tribals all over India share their sympathy for Sita, from the Mundas of

Chhotonagpur and the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, to the Karbis and the Mizos and the Mechs of the North East. Just as the brahminical tradition has partially Sanskritised them, they too have tribalised the epics to some extent, and that outcome is sometimes highly interesting.

We have a wealth of materials from the tribal songs. They, too, look upon Sita as the essential orphan and Rama as the oppressor. Whether he is a king or a god, Rama remains distant, inaccessible and unaccountable for his acts. He is the representative of the brahminical-feudal system, whereas Sita is the child of nature like the tribals themselves. "According to them Rama was not the embodiment of righteousness, an ideal person, or an avatara— as projected by Tulsidas and Krittibas, but an ordinary man with human weaknesses". comments K.S. Singh, writing on the tribal *Ramayanas*, "Ravana is described as the noble hero..., Rama's treatment of Sita draws adverse comments from the singers, she arouses sympathy and remains the symbol of suffering in Munda poetry." (*The Tribal Ramayanas*, pp-50-51). Like the women and the tribals the lower caste Hindus also regard Sita as one of their own.

A.K. Ramanujan, describing a *shudra Ramayana* in Kannada commented how the shudra singer, a man, could not wait to come back to Sita and her life experiences, from her birth and wedding to her abandonment, childbirth and reunion. The fragmentary episodes that the tribals and the shudras select for themselves are also the episodes that the women choose to celebrate. The selection is not accidental, but proves a clear pattern of responding to a brahminical text. Here is the collected voice of the powerless in the society— against the one who wields power.

Ranganayakamma's book is a crusade against Hindu religious bigotry. She calls. *Vishavruksham* a novel in three

parts, it is in effect a provocative collection of different literary genres. The author tells us stories from the epic along with her own interpretations, challenging their logical and moral validity. She also includes her own criticism of other literary critics' dealings with the *Ramayana* material, and mentions the influences she herself had undergone, which culminated in this book. She even weaves into the text long informative essays on Marxist socio-economic theory, Marxist theory of history, of anthropology (the beginnings of the humankind, etc.) — it is a sprawling, discursive piece of work, interspersed with longish short stories, ruthlessly satirising Rama, his actions and his thoughts. Angry academic discourses are cleverly interrupted with funny stories from the *Ramayana*. Through the 16 short stories and as many link-stories, she tells us her tale of Rama from Rama's initiation, with killing Tadaka (Tataki) to his establishing the *Ramarajya* ('Rama replacing the chappals' —as she prefers to put it, instead of using the respectable word *paduka*). Just like Molla she is not interested in episodes that interest other women retellers of the epic. It is not about Sita's sorrows that she is writing, but of the evils of Rama and the socio-political system he represents, of which Sita is a victim among others.

The nature of the creative work becomes clear if one takes a look at the detailed table of contents— an item one does not quite expect in a novel. It is not plain chapter divisions— each topic is numbered, categorized, with subdivisions and an abundance of prefaces. Prefaces appear not merely in the beginning of the volumes but also sometimes in the beginning of the sections, or even in front of stories. At first sight it may seem like a wild collection of text and a thoughtless jumble of genres. But a closer look tells us, here is a modern critique of a traditional text written for a traditional readership with a specific aim, daring to use whichever genre that might

serve the purpose best. What she offers, is a post-modern text, an alternative reading of the epic, exposing the feudal, communal, casteist, sexist bias. She is not dealing with women's *Ramayanas*. Like Molla, it is the classical *Ramayana* that she sets out to subvert.

Here I would like to talk about the author a little. In a conference in Mysore in 1981 about "Men, Women and the Novel", I had heard from my Telugu colleagues the story of this mysterious woman who has done a scathing recasting of the *Ramayana*, calling it *The Poison Tree*, and had to suffer a great deal of social ostracism for it. She was a strange sort anyway, I was told, living in self-exile outside the city; she had deserted her husband, and befriended an admirer young enough to be her son, who served her like a slave; thought extremely unwell and bedridden she shunned all social contacts and was shunned by all in response. I was fascinated by the legend, and wanted to find out more about her ever since, but it was only in 1996 that I actually got to know her and her work.

I went to Hyderabad to meet her. But once there I was told by friends that she discouraged strangers. I felt frustrated at this since Ranganayakamma had not been translated and I could not read her, talking to her was absolutely necessary. Though she was not prone to socialising she was not bedridden any longer, so I took a chance.

Not only did Ranganayakamma give me an appointment, she let me stay with her as her house-guest to learn about her life and about her writing. It was a beautiful but simple house with only the very basic furniture in a quiet suburb outside the city, the last house in the row after which the meadows took over. Here she lived with her sons and her companion, Bapuji. He acted as our interpreter. Both were graceful and helpful though she was a bit reserved, and he enthusiastic

and outgoing. He was nine years her younger, only a postgraduate student (and an admirer of her writing) when they met. She had abandoned her husband in the small town and had travelled to the city along with her sons to find a life of her own, but had no one to go to. This young man took charge of her and paid the rent from his scholarship. She wrote in the newspapers and earned a living for the family. They have been together for 25 years now. Her grown up sons still live with her. Dr. Bapuji teaches at the Central University. Each member of the family has to perform household duties by rote, an elaborate routine is pasted on the wall, stating who cooks who cleans who washes on which day. There were also neat little handwritten notices in Telugu pasted on the walls everywhere. I wanted to know what they were. Those were instructions, I was told. The one near the steps said, "please leave your shoes outside before you enter." It suddenly reminded one faintly of 'O voi que entrate lasciate ogni speranza'.⁽¹⁾ The one near the dining table said, "Please do not make unpleasant noises as you eat. Others may feel uncomfortable. After you finish, carry your plate and glass to the wash basin outside. But if you are ill, or elderly, kindly leave them, we'll take care of it." The one on the toilet- wall said, "Please pull the handle to flush. Then wash your hands and feet with the soap at the tap. Use the towel there to dry yourself. Do not place the mug on top of the cistern because it may fall into the loo and create problems. Thank you." I was deeply impressed, needless to say. Here was a house prepared for all emergencies!

She had stopped writing fiction, and was concentrating on translating *Das Kapital* into Telugu, in five volumes, with elaborate introductions. Once upon a time, she used to be the unparalleled queen of Telugu romance writing, and the most popular script writer of Telugu films, universally adored for her smart, humorous dialogues

and especially for her unconventional women characters, who created role models for young urban Telugu women . All sophisticated young men dreamt of life partners like her heroines. She was offered an expensive plot of land for free to build a house in the posh Film Colony in Hyderabad , which she refused.

But *Vishavruksham* had changed the scene completely. It shocked and alienated her adoring readership, and she voluntarily stopped catering for the film industry, because it went against her new ideology. For the *Poison Tree* she had to face more open hostility than admiration, hate-letters poured in, lawsuits were filed. Three volumes were published between 1974 and 1976 and numerous reprints and new editions followed, the latest has come out in 1995.

After *Vishavruksham* she has not written much fiction, except a two-part novel called *Janaki Vimukti* (the liberation of Janaki) in 1982, where a battered young wife finally gathers the courage to leave her husband, even in a pregnant state, to start a new life on her own. In the end she finds a lover and starts a home with him outside marriage, with her baby. Significantly enough it is called the liberation of Sita, who was abandoned when she was pregnant. (In the *Vishavruksham* there are no miracles, so instead of entering the earth, Sita dies out of shock at the humiliation. She cannot escape).

The seed of the *Poison Tree* can be found in a novel called *Sweet Home* that she wrote in 1968 about a happily married young couple, where the chirpy wife is adventurous in her thoughts and spirit, but her loving husband is very conventional. They have an argument over the *Ramayana*—he declares it a holy book, a part of the scriptures, and his young and feisty wife thinks it is just another old fashioned poem— and Rama is far from divine, he is a rather bad sort, commits several unworthy deeds in the epic, which makes him a poor human being

to some of us. And proceeds to list his misdeeds. The superstitious husband shudders to think what terrible misfortunes might befall them if Rama overheard these blasphemous words! Vimala, the wife, laughs away his worries, saying— "How can a character in a book harm real people?"

The whole of the *Ramayana Vishavruksham* seems to me to be an answer to this central question, pointing out how a book can really corrupt a culture. *Ramayana* is not just any piece of literature, it is the most influential myth, more popular than the *Mahabharata*, a myth that the Indian people have identified with for the ages. Well, we have witnessed in Ayodhya how a character in a poem can do great harm to a whole nation. Choosing Rama as the "symbol of national integration and justice", the Hindu revivalists drove the Rama chariot through the country, spreading the glory of Rama and his party, filling up the vote banks with the votes of devotees, and making new disciples in the process. Rama was propagated in White Paper published by the BJP as the "national hero" who "has been promoted" to the divine status and who is the symbol of ideal governance, *Ramarajya*. Therefore, Rama's birthplace (be it only mythical) had to be liberated from all signs of foreign rule of the Mughal emperors, such as the Babri Mosque. This innocently nationalistic sentiment blossomed out in the ruthless massacres of December 1992 and February 1993. A sensitive and far-sighted Ranganayakamma could clearly imagine the dangerous potentials of the Rama-myth, hence her missionary zeal to warn her people against its poisonous possibilities.

Her anger is directed against the feudal-brahminical-hierarchical system, and she chooses the *Ramayana* as its symbol. This epic, she feels, is primarily responsible for perpetuating these specific values among the common people, and these are harmful ideas, corrupting

influences. After all the *Ramayana* is the most popular myth, we can remember Sally Sutherland's study in the 80's here, where she found Sita was the ideal woman for 90% of this country's men and women, and not Draupadi. The *Mahabharata* is probably more deeply involved with questions of a metaphysical nature, somewhat beyond the grasp of the common people, but the *Ramayana* deals with questions of social morality on a simpler, more mundane level. Rama's problems may be shared more easily, his solutions propagated more widely, than the questions faced by Yudhishtira, Karna, Bhishma, or Arjuna. It is hard to hold up any of them as an ideal man in a situation where Krishna himself reigns supreme. Nor is it possible to look upon Hastinapur as an ideal kingdom to rule after the protracted fratricide, the bloodbath, the tents full of wailing widows, whereas Ayodhya (as the name itself signifies, "the place where war cannot take place") remained unsullied by war, everything took place far away beyond the ocean. Lankapuri fell to its death but no one from Ayodhya had to die for it. The fratricide had to happen among the monkeys and the demons, while Rama, stronger than thunder and softer than flowers, remained loyal to his own brothers and they to him. He is more easily presentable as an ideal man, and as such more dangerous to the society.

In order to make her point, Ranganayakamma tells the Rama stories from her own political angle attacking Rama's heroic image and exposing his weaknesses. We shall take one story from each book to see how she succeeds in exposing the clayfeet of the great hero. Let us look at some of her stories for ourselves. (2)

(This article has been possible only because Ranganayakamma herself and Dr. Bapuji personally helped me with the material while I had imposed myself upon them, guru-shishya style, enjoying their warm

hospitality and discussing her work and learning first hand about this extraordinary couple... Dr. Bapuji did most of the translation and explanation, the rest of the credit goes to Dr. D. Vasantha of Hyderabad and Sm. Usha Sanjappa of Calcutta, who helped by orally translating some of the stories for me.)

Book I begins with the story titled *This is Ramayana*. The great sage Viswamitra visits Rama's father Dasaratha's court and offers his greetings to the king. Which means he asks questions like :

"Are your vassals subordinate to you?
Are you performing enough sacrifices?
Are you distributing wealth to the brahmins?
I hope caste pollution is not taking place here?

I hope the brahmins are not being allowed to help the shudras in their worships and rituals?

Are the wives obedient to their husbands?
The sons obedient to the fathers?
The subjects humble and obedient to the King?"

Ranganayakamma quotes these questions from the southern recension of the *Valmiki Ramayana*. These are enough, she explains, to tell us about the inequalities of the feudal patriarchal social system and the oppression of the shudras and women and sons and subjects by the King-Brahmin nexus.

After the princes are taken to the forest by Viswamitra, Rama meets Tadaka. Here she introduces a dialogue between Rama and Tadaka. Viswamitra takes young Rama to kill Tadaka, who turns out to be an ordinary tribal woman with a lovely smile, colourful beads around her neck, flower in her hair, and a bow and arrow in her hands. — "Why have you come to this dense forest, my child?" she fondly asks, worried that thorns would hurt young Rama's tender feet. Embarrassed, Rama replies

with a question:— why was she disturbing the sages? Tadaka has a ready reply. “Because they kill wild animals for their rituals, without reason, pour nourishing food like ghee and honey into the fire while the poor starve, can control neither their anger nor their lust. And have split the people into four castes and created inequality to grab special advantages in the name of god, they are greedy for women, fame, power, immorality, even divinity.! Why should they be revered?” The young uninitiated Rama is in a dilemma. But Viswamitra quickly steps in: “Don’t talk to that activist, a dangerous rebel, just kill her.” “But she is a woman”, fumbles Rama. Viswamitra helps him out: “Demons have no gender my child, kill her quick!” Rama shoots his arrow.

In this critical scene of initiation, Ranganayakamma portrays a very different image of Rama than the one found in the classical texts: a weak, ungrateful and manipulatable Rama, rather than the valiant saviour of the weak. This is the young royalty’s initiation into injustice. Three points are clear in this story :

- 1) The King-Brahmin nexus excludes the poor, the shudras, the tribals and the women.
- 2) The feudal political system runs in the family too.
- 3) Ranganayakamma has her sympathies for the people of the woodlands, the unsophisticated tribals who possess natural human kindness. Also they have their own way of critiquing the corrupt brahminical tradition. It is a clever way of glorifying the tribals and humiliating the sages and the king
- 4) Rama’s initiation is an initiation into a life of inglorious activities, learning to go against his conscience to earn fame and to please the brahmins (This is what we see in the end in the Shambuka episode of Uttarakanda).

The teenage Rama soon grows up into the Ideal Male,

in her crusade against the image of the ideal man (*maryada purushottoma*) Ranganayakamma portrays Rama as arrogant and callous, a hypocrite and a narcissist, one who cannot see beyond himself, and is incapable of love.

The classical texts depict with great poignancy the scene where Rama laments his loss, discovering that Sita has been abducted. In Book II, Story 5, we can see how Ranganayakamma visualises this key scene. Rama discovers Sita's absence and decides to go through the ten stages of the "Erotic Art of Separation" (*Viraha*) according to the "Textbook of Erotic Art" (*Shringara shastram*). He begins by talking to the trees and the creepers, then to the birds and the beasts— giving them great details of Sita's physical resources and asking whether they have seen her. The rustic Lakshmana starts to fidget and finally suggests: "Its getting late, Brother, besides plants won't tell you anything".

An unperturbed Rama assures him— it was too late already, the demons must have torn Sita into tiny tender pieces and gobbled up her beautiful, sandal pasted breasts. This was too much for the simple hearted Lakshmana, he bursts out into loud hysteric sobs. At which an irritated Rama comments: "Here I am meticulously following all the ten stages of the art of separation, trying to keep it flawless, according to the Shastras, and here he goes, wanting me to *actually* go around *physically* searching for her!"

A stunned Lakshmana stops sobbing and decides Rama must have gone out of his mind.

Rama, however, disgustedly grunts: "Did she listen to me, when I told her not to come?"

This also is the title of the story. We can clearly see he is placing the blame squarely on Sita's shoulders. Sita deserved it— because she broke the codes of conduct— she has transgressed. Not merely the magic circle on the

ground — but also her husband's orders. It is interesting to note that in this story an interaction is shown between the plants, the beasts and Rama. Nature regards him as a danger to the forest and its inhabitants. But they trust and love Sita. "He is not a real sage," the mother elephant warns her baby, "tomorrow he will be a king, wage a war and trap us all into serving on his army. Wars are bad. It means death. Kings are not to be trusted. Stay away from Rama!"

Rama is presented as anti-nature and anti-life, as a war-monger. A mother bird abuses Rama using the word *papishthi* in Telugu, because he had killed her baby for lunch. It is not surprising that we hear the very same word *papishthi* in Bangla, in connection with Rama, in a contemporary women's song on Sita's exile(*ekhono papishthi Ramer puri dekha jay re*) in rural Bangladesh. *Papishthi* means a sinner. Rama, the king, the saviour of the sinners (*patita pavana raja Ram*), is himself regarded as a sinner here..

Through stories like these Ranganayakamma provokes her readership into taking a fresh look at Rama and all that he stands for. Ranganayakamma, unfortunately, does not stop with writing a story, she also writes plenty of notes and footnotes, adds her own comments, and explains her strategy. I wish she would respect her readers a bit more and leave the judgment to them. Well, her point is not art for art's sake, but to proselytize — to drive the one point home, that Rama's is a dangerous ideology — it is harmful for the world and she does not want to take chances, even at the cost of literary excellence.

Sita appears in very few of the stories. We shall now take two stories from Book III where we meet Sita. Story 9 tells us Sita's inner thoughts as she waits in Ravana's orchard. She is puzzled. "Why did I fail to burn Ravana down to cinders, by just looking hard at him? After all,

isn't my great power of chastity supposed to do just that?", she wonders. "Could it be then, that I am just an ordinary woman, and no such supernatural power actually exists in me? Thank god I didn't curse him in public," Sita shudders to think, "What if I had, and it didn't work? That would have been terribly embarrassing!"

Then a worse thought occurs to her — "What if Rama too is powerless like me — just another ordinary mortal? And what if this ordinary mortal has already completed his exile and returned to Ayodhya and plunged into the pleasures of the flesh?"

At this juncture a dashing, handsome Ravana tumbles in, drunk on his love for Sita and on alcohol, with an entourage of queens, and offers Sita his heart, his treasures, and his throne. One of the younger queens cannot help wailing: "But this is exactly what he had told me!" "And to me, too!" sobs another. The queens exchange notes and decide that men are incapable of love, being driven by lust alone. As Ravana's libido gets stronger, Sita feebly reminds him of Rambha's curse (not daring to curse him herself) if he touched any woman against her wishes he would lose his heads (he had ten). At this point his wives wisely drag him away. There are very few stories where Sita's thoughts are expressed. "Doubts are crawling out of my heart — like serpents from an anthill" is what the chaste Sita is made to say here about her husband.

Our next story, Story 14, *Panchayeti*, depicts an introspective Rama after the war. He is in a dilemma, waiting for Sita to be brought to him. Should he, a scion of the great dynasty of Raghu, take back a wife who had been abducted? She can not possibly remain chaste after such a long time, after all! His soul scolds him and tells him, he knows very well that Sita is chaste. But Rama argues with his soul: "Oh, I know, but do the people

of Ayodhya know?" His soul argues, they do not matter as long as he knows. But Rama makes his fiendish comment: "Did she listen to me when I asked her not to come?" This arrogance irritates his soul. It blurts out: "Had Sita not followed you to the forest you would not have achieved your glory of saving the sages, the gods and the universe from the evils of Ravana, nor the pleasure of grabbing his kingdom, Lanka!" An angry Rama cannot stand blunt truths and fiercely abuses his soul. Hence his soul abandons him forever, saying that such selfish, hypocritical and ambitious people do not need a soul. At this dramatic point Sita innocently appears. And a soulless Rama lashes out: "I don't want food licked by a dog" etc. Great scenes follow. Sita jumps into the fire, is saved by the gods. Gods hold a council and force Rama to take Sita back. Even his dead father Dasaratha appears to plead on Sita's behalf. Reluctant though he is, Rama has to let Sita meekly climb into the flying chariot beside him. The army of monkeys and bears watching the scene snigger at Sita:

"How shameless of her!"

"But what else can she do? Poor princess!"

"Why? Had she been one of ours she would have given her wretched husband a good piece of her mind and marched off to her mother's."

"These humans! They have no shame!"

In this story, called the *Council of Elders* (*Panchayeti*), where the divinities hold a council to vouch for Sita's chastity, the absurdity of the concept of chastity is as evident as the soullessness of a selfish, ambitious and self-deceiving Rama. His career comes before his family life—his public image before his love.

Rama is the hero who proudly declares— *Satyam ishtam hi me sada* (truth is always my aim) and therefore, he tells his wife: "I would rather lose my life, lose you,

Sita, than break a promise,... especially one given to a brahmin."

The domestic embodies the political here. To the hero who propagates caste, class, gender hierarchy, state comes before the individual (leaves Sita for the gossip of a washerman), father, the patriarch, comes before the mother (cf. A weeping Kaushalya begging Rama not to go to the forest exile, and being rejected) brother before wife (cf. Lakshmana leaves Urmila to accompany his brother, Rama weeps for Lakshmana after the Shaktishela saying he would rather lose his wife than his brother). But not all the subjects are equal, the brahmin comes before all else. A shudra practising asceticism, a threat to the brahmins, has to be beheaded to prove the purity of the Rama-rajya. A precious brahmin life is saved.

Hence Ranganayakamma does not endeavour to find a woman's voice— she uses her own voice which is no more that of a woman's, but an impersonal critic's. In other words a male voice, the voice of power. One who possesses all the tools to criticize, to analyse, to reject a traditional text, does not need the female voice, which functions within its allocated space. Molla borrowed the male voice to sing the sacred text as a woman, because she wanted to move outside her allocated space. That was her style of subversion.

Ranganayakamma also subverts the *Ramayana*, first by calling it a *Poison Tree*, then by taking the narrative to bits and poking fun at a sacred figure and an image of dignity. She deflates both Rama and Sita, by deflating the narrative strategy. She pricks the balloon of grandeur in the case of Rama and that of pathos in the case of Sita. Both characters are shaken loose from their traditional classical roots and presented as ordinary mortals. Sita too is a mythological construct although she is the margin of the ideology. Ranganayakamma hits the ideological centre, which is Rama, breaking his image as the ideal

man. Her sole purpose is to expose the clayfeet of the gilded image of the so called hero, the *maryada purushottama*, and she succeeds with flying colours.

Let us look at some of the short, crisp comments the book is strewn with.

1) *Why this book?*

To encourage the readers to question religious and moral texts. Do not accept anything blindly, everything that tradition offers you is not necessarily nectar. It sometimes offers you poison, too. Beware of the poison.

2) Then she incites the reader to ask a few questions : *why was the Ramayana written?*

a) To protect which class of people? b) To make which values permanent? c) To save which institutions? d) For whose benefit is it being used by the media now? Try to find answers to all these questions. Ranganayakamma advises her readers, if you analyse the *Ramayana* as a case study, you will not only learn about yourself and your own cultural identity, you will also learn about other cultures. In her ardent exposition of the hidden agenda of cultural production we do detect a tendency to spoon feed her readers with her own ideology in place of that of the *Ramayana*. A case of indoctrination can be sensed, one ideology replacing another.

There are countless *Ramayanas*, which one to read? Well, Ranganayakamma says, the core story will remain the same. The *kathavastu* will tell you the social, political, moral and economic values that the *Ramayana* propagates. You will learn about your class and gender exploitation, become aware of the dominant ideology that has not changed in 2000 years. You would also know, it was high time you threw it away.

3) Next she asks: *Is the Ramayana a beautiful poem?* By beauty she is thinking more of ethics than of aesthetics. Plenty of physical and natural beauty is described but there is no inner beauty. Remember, she says, at the bottom of it all lies the desire for empire building (*rajyakanksha*) and shrewd diplomatic tactics (*kutata*), selfishness (*swartha*) and a web of lies (*mithyajal*). This is what *Ramayana* is all about: temptation, deception, betrayal, lust, abandonment, mutilation, oppression— are these beautiful things to read about? And absurd miracles, supernatural elements, things that are logically impossible ,therefore bad for one's mind. Where a woman is deprived of her identity and turned into a living corpse (*jivita shava*), where various women's nose, ears, even breasts are cut off by young men, where a husband abandons his innocent, pregnant wife— is that poem beautiful?

Much as I appreciate Ranganayakamma's encouraging her readers to question and judge for themselves a text that carries the unquestioned authority of the scriptures, I cannot agree that this is what the *Ramayana* is all about. It is, as she had rightly pointed out in one of her many prefaces, a poem about the moral principles by which a feudal society is ruled.

Incidentally, here is a story that might help us to understand our author better. While Dr. Bapuji and I were going through these texts together sitting on their balcony one morning, an impressive row of cars stopped at the lake nearby. Soon after, a policeman arrived and said something most courteously to Dr.Bapuji. Asking him to wait, Bapuji went inside. He soon came back and said "sorry" and explained something in Telugu. The policeman looked a bit confused, but went away. I was

curious to know what was happening. "Nothing," said he, "The Deputy Inspector General of Police's mother has died, he has come to perform her last rites at the lake. But they have forgotten to bring a bucket. So he wanted to borrow a bucket from us. I went to ask her permission. She said as a Marxist she does not believe in rituals, and we will not help in the perpetuation of such superstitious activities. They can borrow it from someone else." This story needs no comments.

From time to time her book deteriorates into a straightforward mechanical marxist interpretation of the epic. She takes the mythical exaggerations literally and refutes them logically like the multiplicity of Ravana's heads, or the elasticity of Hanuman's body and his rather longish jump across the ocean, or Sita's entering the earth. A weird mixture of talented creative writing and blunt marxist analysis, with nearly 600 footnotes to boot, the *Ramayana Vishavruksham* remains one of a kind.

Just as in the collective voice of the powerless and the dispossessed, the rural women, the shudras, and the tribals express their own sorrows through Sita, separatist movements, and fundamentalist political parties have always had a tendency to exploit Rama to propagate their own political agenda. They are either against Rama or pro-Rama.

- a) Rama is condemned as the representative of Aryan-brahmanical exploitation of the indigenous people, as a symbol of north India's cultural imperialism over the south, a politicised image carefully constructed by Periyar E.V.Ramasami Naicker, the founder of the Dravida Kazhaghham party, in order to arouse Tamil ethnic awareness and incite hostility towards north India. Periyar glorifies Ravana as the great Dravidian hero, the ideal ruler unfairly oppressed and destroyed by Rama, the Aryan

invader. (Periyar's Dravida Kazhaghham is the original party which had Annadurai, Karunanidhi, Shivaji Ganesan, etc. as its members, but they broke away and formed their own Dravida Munnetra Kazhaghham party within the decade.) So intent was he on the north/south, aryan/draavidian divide that Periyar in fact contacted Jinnah at the time of partition asking also for a Dravida nadu along with Pakistan as opposed to Hindusan. But neither Jinnah nor the British government heard his plea, and there were no positive responses to his appeal. Such separatist tendencies are as strongly despised by Ranganayakamma as narrow Hindu revivalist enthusiasm.

- b) Rama is glorified by the Hindu revivalist political parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangha, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad etc as an apparently unifying force, an epic hero is turned into a national hero, elevated to the status of a divine hero, representing equality and justice. For both the Dravida Kazhaghham Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party Rama is made to serve as much more than an epic hero. For them he is neither a literary figure, nor a spiritual religious entity, but a conduit to political power, a magic mantra to win votes, either in favour or against.
- c) Ranganayakamma disapproves of both the approaches. Although she does agree with a lot of Periyar's criticism of Rama and with his detailed analysis of the *Ramayana* text, she disagrees with his basic theory of the north/south divide. She also criticises the fact that EVR is not aware of the rich/poor divide and has pretty conservative views on women, propagating sexism.
- d) Ranganayakamma also rejects Ravana as an ideal

hero. For her, Ravana and Rama are but brothers in tyranny. Both represent the ruling class, dominate the weak and treat women as property. Both are equally dangerous to a healthy society as both perpetrate class, caste and gender hierarchy. Both happen to be oppressors by nature and by social sanction. Hence, Ranganayakamma believes the *Ramayana* to be a dangerous text, a retrogressive force in today's social order.²

The BJP's portrayal of Rama as the "great national hero elevated to the status of god" (BJP manifesto for the parliamentary elections 1991, quoted in the BJP White Paper on Ayodhya, 1993, p.8), naturally, would not be acceptable to Ranganayakamma. (When she wrote the *Ramayana Vishavriksham*, the BJP was not yet a political force, hence she has not commented on the party position., whereas she has dedicated a whole chapter on Periyar's monograph, *Ramayana : A True Reading*). From her ideological standpoint clearly she would object to the feudal Brahminical hero being used as a unifying cultural political force. The interchangeability of the mythical with the historical is bad enough but identifying the so called historical with the divine is much worse. It flouts all reason upon which she positions her reading of the *Ramayana*.

It is neither Sita nor Rama that interests Ranganayakamma, but the myth-making process, the construction of these characters, the ideological production of identities. In a way, her approach criticises the village women's Sita songs, where the suffering women identify with the victim. No, forbearance is not a good word for Ranganayakamma, it sustains the dominant ideology, and perpetrates the social evils. Being a doormat allows the oppressor to oppress further. Sita, the suffering Indian woman, acts as a passive accomplice.

She does not break out of the system, but by bravely bearing along merely helps to continue it. No, that is not *sudhamadhuri* for Ranganayakamma, but poison, indeed.

1. The Radhakrishnan Memorial Lectures, All Souls College, Oxford University (Excerpted from Lecture 3; May 1997).
2. Incidentally, in 1861, Michael Madhusudan Datta had written *Meghnad-Badh Kavya*, a clearly anti-Rama epic in Bangla glorifying Ravana and his son, but that had no specific political purpose, nor any religious intention as in the Jain Ramayanas. It was a wholly personal rebellion against the Brahminical tradition, he despised Rama as an effeminate character and admired Ravana for his courage. However, it is not in anyway comparable to EVR's politically motivated interpretation.

ENCLOSURE AND THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

RATAN KHASNABIS

In pre-feudal Europe, the concept of ownership over land was based on Roman law, which provided unitary and exclusive right of the family (community) over agricultural holding. In the feudal era the right over agricultural holding was based on feudal canon under which the right over land was bifurcated. The lord had ownership right over all land under his estate but he used to lease out the land to vassals against feudal service. Under feudal canon, the vassal also could freely parcel out his estate (known as fief) and sub-enfeoff to the vassal of his own; thus he would become a middle lord. Sub-enfeoff vassal had loyalty to middle lord only. The ordinary peasants lived in manor (usually found in central and south England). A manor had a distinct geographical boundary, under the control of the

concerned feudal ruler. Within a manor, depending on the size of it, there had been a village or a cluster of villages. The manor provided subsistence to the villagers who used to settle there and exercised customary rights over its open arable fields, its meadows and its common 'waste' of woodland and pasture ground. The members of the village community were to cultivate the land according to manor routine. The 'waste' was for common use (livestock raising up to certain number, collecting hay, etc.) Some arable land had to be kept as lord's personal domain (known as *demesne*). Each villager had to provide labour service (three days a week) to the *demesne*. The system developed from sixth century A.D. and its full-grown form appeared in twelfth century. In course of time some villagers (usually the villagers with a virgate of thirty acres) could replace the labour-rent with kind-rent and thus they become 'free' peasants. But even then they hardly had any freedom to ignore the custom based obligations.

In a feudal society, property right as well as the usufruct¹ on land remained bifurcated. The lord at every tier had property right on his fief; he also exercised usufructory right over a part of his fief known as *demesne*. The land on which the peasants had customary rights generated two types of interests, namely usufruct and ownership interest. The usufruct was with the peasants and the ownership was with the immediate lord who earned rent out of this ownership right. Dispute, if any, with property rights was settled in lord's court (*curia*). The court used to dispense with fief rights only. In settling the fief rights custom was supreme and best known by the tradition of those who practiced it. Legal immunity was the fulcrum of the system; the lord was immune to the vassal and the vassal was immune to serf. Feudal privilege had been the key and this was highly discriminatory in nature. The manors also used to

function according to custom. The cotters and also the other villi^{ens}² had enjoyed democracy, the essence of which was the obligation to attend manorial court where 'custom of the manor and its working' would be announced. The villagers were supposed to abide by them. Their right to live in a manor was conditioned by the obligation to abide by the custom based rules of the manor.

Thus during the feudal era, the right (and obligation) of a person was based on custom. Behind custom, there had been a concept of justice the propelling force of which was hierarchy-based rights and obligations. Exclusion was hardly practiced because, this was against the spirit of obligation of the lord to the vassals and of vassals to serfs. The concept of feudal justice was replaced with an elaborate jurisprudence which the British gentry claimed to have borrowed from the Roman law of property that gives the right of exclusion, during the Enclosure Movement.

Enclosure and the Emergence of the New Concept of Property Rights

Enclosure first targeted the common waste on which the villagers had customary right. To trace the process, one should note that Enclosure Movement took place in England in two distinct phases. In the first phase which started in the 12th century, the need for enclosing the commons came from the feudal lords who tried to usurp the productivity gain in agriculture by allowing the commons to be enclosed for developing pastoral land to meet the demand from growing woolen industry. The new class that emerged in Phase 1 of enclosure consisted of a section of yeoman farmers, the merchants and the new entrepreneurs in wool industry.

The economic reason had been that the enclosed land would fetch better rent. In terms of the theory of rent,

the owner of the land can get a share of the rising productivity by charging a differential rent on intra-marginal land. The feudal lords had a share of the produce in the form of rent on the basis of (customary) ownership right on land; such rent is known as absolute ground rent, to follow the Ricardian terminology. Absolute ground rent does not contain any share for the owner of the land on the productivity gain that a farmer can acquire by better farming. In the middle ages, the concept of productivity gain was not there until the peasantry introduced the innovative technique of cultivation under Three Field System and improved water management (mechanized wheel under wind mill technology). In fact the gain in productivity created the opportunity for the farmers to replace labour service with rent in kind. The feudal lords did get the message. The peasants were utilizing the gain in productivity for buying their freedom from the landlords as labour service was being replaced with kind (and subsequently cash) rent. The feudal lord could hardly prevent it. A lord could not claim a share of productivity gain because their customary right was on absolute ground rent only. *Redistribution of holdings by expropriating the traditional farmers from the manor for getting the benefit of differential ground rent from the new tenants was not possible because the individual farmer had customary right over the parcel of land that he used to cultivate and eviction was not possible according to feudal canon.*

As the fresh demand for land came from growing woolen industry, the feudal lords now had the opportunity to get a share of differential ground rent. The method was that the commons which had not been under the possession of any individual farmer could be enclosed and leased out for sheep grazing. The losers had been the ordinary farmers including the copyholders in the manor. They were now denied the traditional right

on commons. Enclosure Phase 1 is thus the phase of introducing displacement of the peasants from the commons in English countryside. It grossly violated the feudal custom that the villagers would enjoy the usufructory right over commons.

The next phase of Enclosure, i.e., Enclosure Phase 2 began with the general rise in productivity of agriculture roughly from the beginning of the 16th century. By the end of 16th century, villeinage was over in most part of England. The feudal rights over land, most of which was customary were now being undermined; the traditional farmers were being evicted for fetching higher rent. Enhancing rent was possible not only on pastoral holdings. Even in the crop land there had been a tremendous rise in agricultural productivity³ a part of which could be realized by the landlords. The economics of production was that large-scale farming would be cost effective. Hence enclosing the croplands for large-scale farming had become necessary although this was against the feudal canon. Large-scale farming would contribute to productivity gain which, *inter alia*, would fetch better rent (as well as better profit) from agricultural endeavor. The historical factor that contributed to the acceleration in enclosure movement on croplands was that the food grain prices had been increasing over time (which reached its peak during Napoleonic war that provided the basis for the demand of the abolition of Corn Law at the beginning of the 19th century).

Enclosing the croplands would not have been possible without undermining the age old (feudal) usufructory rights of the individual peasants over cropland. The British political and legal system took up this exercise as the old monarchy learned to live with the new social scenario that provided the basis for Cromwellian revolution. By 1660 feudal tenure was abolished. Only the landlords

had now the legal rights over land. The small copyholders were placed under arbitrary death duty so that they could be evicted from land. By 1677, the legal provision changed in such a way that the small free holders should be no less secure than the copyholders. The old nobility that could uphold the feudal canon of justice had now been disappearing. Following the Glorious Revolution that replaced James II, land worth of five million pound was confiscated and sold; 1.5 million pound was raised from fine on royalist who had to sell a considerable part of their estate to meet the obligation. Consequently, a new gentry class emerged in the countryside of Britain who would consider land as 'capital' for enhancing their asset base. The new gentry class consisting of the merchants, the government contractors, the yeoman farmers, the shareholders of East India Company and the holders of the public offices, had a new set of values that shaped the British (bourgeois) legal system, as reflected in the incidence of lawful eviction of the British small peasants⁴.

Enclosure and the Legal Process of New Britain

In Enclosure phase 1, enclosing the commons took place by means of individual acts of violence against the ordinary villagers who used to enjoy customary rights over the commons. There had been no legal sanction but the lords hardly cared for any such sanction. The social approval being weak and the Church and the old feudal State being still under the medieval social ethos, the practice of enclosure was being denounced by the Church and the government at that time. In fact, legislation was drawn up against it. However, the tide of elite opinion began to turn towards support for enclosure, as the rate of enclosure increased in the 17th century. Individual Act of violence was no longer necessary. Following the Cromwellian Revolution, the political

power was with the new elite which vested the legal rights over land to the (new) landlords. Getting legal sanction was not a problem now. Legal sanction came usually from a series of Parliamentary Acts addressing individual regions, which were given a common framework in the Enclosure Consolidation Act of 1801⁵. This laid down a model of procedure for the enclosure of common lands in particular. In 1836, a second General Enclosure Act was passed. This was concerned with the open fields and it gave local farmers the right to appoint commissioners and to enclose land without direct reference to Parliament. In 1845, a third (and final) Enclosure Act was passed. This established a group of 'specialist' commissioners who would travel round to the different villages to supervise the enclosing of land. They then reported back to Parliament and one General Act of Enclosure was passed for all the villages inspected during the course of the year.

Enclosure had been implemented at this stage by the legally appointed commissions. At a series of meetings called by the commissioners, landowners had to make a claim as to how much land they should be awarded under the enclosure. The commissioners then had to decide on the validity of each claim and come to a decision as to who was actually entitled to receive land in the award. When finally the land had been allocated, the surveyors drew up a new map of the village displaying the new enclosures, boundaries between each section of land and the location of new paths and roads. With the new enclosure map went the award, a list of all the landowners who were allocated land in the enclosed village. The Parliamentary Commissions were invariably of the same class and outlook as the major landholders, hence it was not surprising that the great landholders awarded themselves the best land and the most of it, thereby making England a classic land of great, well-kept estates

with a small marginal peasantry and a large class of rural wage labourers. Those with only customary claim to use the land fell by the wayside, as did those marginal cotters and squatters who had depended on use of the wastes for their bare survival as partly independent peasants.

How does one explain these acts of enclosing the commons and the lands of the possession of small farmers by the British elite in the framework of the modern concept of justice? The expropriated peasantry received some compensation. But as G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate observed, 'their strict legal claims were generally met, but their equitable claims were almost wholly ignored'⁶. The awards were mostly in favour of the wealthier class; the persons without documentary rights on land hardly received any compensation. The poor cotters did not find even alternative employment in the rural areas. They were driven to the newly growing cities where some of them found employment in factories. Many of these dispossessed peasants were driven to 'work house' where they would get state funded food under 'Poor Law'. In other words, a large section of the dispossessed peasants were denied equity-based justice. The British law did not compel the new gentry class to bear the full cost of displacement. Moreover, the cost in the form of cost of feeding the dispossessed poor peasants who did not receive compensation was shifted to the state. The state had to bear the cost in order to maintain the legitimacy of the system. As the incidence of eviction increased, the cost of feeding such people was increasing enormously and by 1830s the yearly average cost of maintaining the 'work houses' increased to 60 million Pound⁷. It appears that the private cost of enclosing the commons was rather low and the major part of the economic burden was shifted as social cost to the state by the British gentry⁸.

The process by which the grabbing of land was done

in England is best described in *Capital Volume 1* by Karl Marx. While analyzing the process of primitive capital accumulation in Britain, he discussed extensively the Enclosure Movement and summed up the process of justice and legality in the then Britain. As he observed, in the early phase of Enclosure 'the process was carried on by means of individual acts of violence against which legislation, for a 150 years, fought in vain. The advance made by the 18th century shows that the law itself now became the instrument by which people's land is stolen. The parliamentary form of robbery is that of 'means for Enclosure of commons'; in other words, a decree by which the landowners grant themselves the people's land as private property, decree of expropriation the people'. (Marx, K. (1976); Page 885, Chapter 27)

Enclosure, Justice and Power

The emerging concept of justice, as capitalism had been developing its sway over the British society had a few features. In the feudal era, the customary right of the peasants had not usually been violated if the hierarchy-based loyalty was maintained. Their usufructory rights were never denied, although there did not exist elaborate jurisprudence to explain what is 'usufructory right' and how this was to be protected. The capitalist order ignored this customary right. The reason had been quite material. The possibility of enjoying higher rent from ownership right cannot be explored unless the custom based usufruct is replaced with a new one that would permit eviction of the subject peasantry. Since the custom did not allow it, initially this was executed by individual acts of violence against the unwilling peasants. The landlords were yet to translate it in the language of jurisprudence and the British state was yet to concede to the will of the landlords. Moral sanction was also not there⁹ for Enclosure Movement. It took a long time to reset the

jurisprudence so that this act of encroachment on the customary rights could get a legal sanction.

The new jurisprudence redefined the property rights so that the peasants could be denied their customary rights on land. At the same time, the jurisprudence required the Enclosure to create some provision for compensation for the displaced peasants to be legally possible. This part of the juridical provision was the contribution of enlightenment-driven modernity. Compensation for the displaced (as and when it occurred) was never heard of in the feudal era. The new society, the capitalist society of 'enlightenment', was now propagating a new concept of justice in which equity (fairness, impartiality) was supposed to be the guiding principle. Legal provisions, according to the new wisdom, must not be based on privileges, and they must not be discriminatory in nature. In the context of enclosure, the new legal provision, in the first place, admitted the need of eviction (because the reality of the demand of capitalist agriculture had to be recognized) by redefining the property rights so that eviction would be legally possible. At the same time, it incorporated certain provisions that might reflect the wisdom of enlightenment-driven concept of justice that upholds the principle of equity. The British law thus legalized the forced eviction of the peasants and at the same time it created a provision for compensation (because principle of equity demands that he should be compensated for the loss of his usufructory rights on land) for the displaced. The wisdom of the ruling class that eviction must be allowed with a provision for compensation was translated in the language of jurisprudence in the Enclosure Act(s) of Britain.

But then, law is essentially epiphenomenal part of the super structure that reflects, in the main, the need and interest of the ruling class—the class that dominates over

the economy, which is why it cannot be impartial or fare to every social class. England in the era of enlightenment had been no exception. The equity between the rulers and the ruled could hardly be honoured in that society, as it happens to be so in every society in which domination of one class over the other exists. Enclosure Acts had therefore, been conservative in accommodating the true spirit of usufructory rights of the peasants, as they had traditionally been enjoying. In the Enclosure Acts the customary rights of the peasants were not recognized as usufructory rights. Only such peasants (mostly a section of the yeomanry) who had documentary evidence of such rights were recognized to be entitled under Enclosure Act(s) for receiving compensation. The principle of equity was flouted in this way. The immediate reason was to allow a section of the ruling class to acquire the property of the weaker section at a low private cost. Law itself was encouraging the land grab. The enclosure through Enclosure Act(s) was thus 'parliamentary form of robbery' as rightly pointed out by Karl Marx. This was done when the philosophy of enlightenment was ruling the roosts in Britain and principle of equity was recognized as the basis of new jurisprudence.

History of Enclosure Movement also reveals that the burden of enclosure-driven displacement was also shifted, to some extent, to the state which had to create enhanced provision¹⁰ for feeding the displaced. In the language of economics, this part of the burden of displacement is economic expression of social cost. The state had to shoulder this burden in order to keep the conflict between the ruler and the ruled within a tolerable limit – so that the legitimacy of the state is not placed under threat and the abject violation of the principle of equity is not questioned. The society across classes would there by accept the rule of law and the social tension

would pacify in course of time—a phenomenon which indeed took place in Britain during the 19th century.

Principle of equity demands that the private cost and social cost taken together should meet the full value of compensation. This was hardly honoured in England during the Enclosure Movement. One may add that the equity-based justice is never practiced even in the contemporary world—the world that we live in now.

Notes and References

1. Usufructory right is the right to use and enjoy the advantage and profits of the *property of another* without altering or damaging the substance.
2. A villager (known as villein) used to hold a yard land or virgate of thirty acres (or its half) distributed in scattered acre-strips in three or two open fields in the manor. In course of time villien with smaller strips of land also emerged. They were known as cotters.
3. The productivity gain in croplands was possible due to changes in technology. Oxen were replacing horses as draft animals. Better drainage system, hedging and ditching contributed to better crop management; more intensive cultivation was now possible.
4. As the Enclosure Movement in phase 2 expropriated a section of the peasantry whose croplands had been enclosed (with or without compensation), there emerged a class of agricultural labourers who would seek wage employment in farmland. Their ultimate destination was the newly growing cities where they would seek employment in factories and other enterprises.
5. Enclosure took place in many different ways but these can be classified into two broad categories: formal and informal. Formal enclosures include both Parliamentary enclosures, those which derived their authority from either a Private Act of Parliament or from one of the General Enclosure Acts. In 1801, the first General Enclosure Act was passed.
6. G.D.H. Cole and Postgate, R. *The Common People. (1746-1946);* pp 122

7. Morton, A.L. *A Peoples History of England*; pp 131
8. One should add that in order to reduce the social cost, the British gentry, by its hold over the Parliament, brought a change in the 'Poor Law'. This was done by appointing a Commission which strongly recommended that the cost of maintaining the 'work houses' should be reduced further by cutting the budget for food and lodging of the displaced poor. The Commission also advised that the poor should not be allowed to raise a family in the 'work house'; the couple should be forced to live in separate 'work houses'.
9. As we have already pointed out, Church used to denounce enclosure in the 16th and early 17th century.
10. At the middle of the 18th century the cost of supporting the poor under Poor Law was about 7 lakh Pound a year. The budget increased to about 20 lakh Pound in 1790 and in 1800, it escalated to 80 lakh Pound. After that the yearly budget stabilised at about 60 lakh Pound. (A. L. Morton: *A Peoples History of England*; page 341)

POSTMODERNISM INDIAN STYLE

DIPENDU CHAKRABARTI

Whenever I attend a seminar in Calcutta on postmodernism my gut feeling is that Indian academics in general are living in postmodern India, turning their back on an India that is both pre-modern and modern. The postmodern world knows no national and geographical boundaries. What is happening in the West, particularly in America, is also happening in India, simply because we have cable TV, FM Radio, Home Theater, Internet, Mobile phone and a consumerist life style engendered by the multi-national companies. It is as if Baudrillard's simulacra have pervaded our consciousness. Add to this the frequent visits of our academics to the West or America, in particular, and in this age of globalization, they speak like the intellectual ambassadors of a New India, where modernist project need not be completed because Lyotard has exposed its

self-defeating tendencies, and the hyper-real has replaced the real, because Baudrillard could not have it otherwise. After all, what the western theorists thought yesterday, we think today. Old Indian habits die hard.

In the twenty-first century the academics in India are being compelled to speak post-modernese because our role model is American academia. So, a simple statement in a simple language that makes sense is *pas*. For example, take this statement : 'The way white guys treat third world women as sex objects is shallow and disgusting.' This kind of clarity in language will not do, so we must translate it into postmodern verbal play like this :

'This hegemonic misrepresentation and de/valorization of the always/already multi (de) / gendered plurivocalities and (de) centered de/constructed and dialogically problematized ludic simulacra of absent / present post colonial female subject positions, by hypererotized and orientalist phallogocentric and panoptic (in the Foucaultian sense) Dead White-Male subject-position discourse is a textually (re) inscribed praxis of pre-disseminated (counter) subversive depthlessness (Quoted from 'Postmodernism for Beginners by Jim Powell)'.

The seminars give us a chance to showcase our ability to speak the postmodernist lingua franca. For example, a simple sentence like 'Contemporary buildings are alienating' should be rephrased as 'pre/post/specialities of counter-architectural hyper-contemporality (re) commits us to an ambivalent recurrentiality of anti-sociality/seductivity enunciated in a de/gendered-Baudrillardian discourse of granulated subjectivity.'

This is how post-modernists communicate with each other all over the world and the Indian postmodernists must observe the rules of the same language game.

American postmodernists of course speak for the West

and have nothing to say about the third world. Foucault in an interview said that he did not know much about China. How many post modernists in America bother about India? They may defend themselves saying that it is not their business. In fact it is the post-colonialists' job to present properly the third world to the first one, and the job is well done. They have been eminently successful in their project which pleases both the worlds. This is inevitable, because our Pocos mainly operate from the land of Pomos, and the Pocos prepare the ground in our country for the safe landing of the western Pomos who do not recognise any post-colonial phase of America. America is post-industrial, not post-colonial. Other British colonies write back to the empire, but present day America treats Britain almost as a colony, as we saw at the time of the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. No postmodern theorist in America, to my knowledge, has attacked America imperialism as ruthlessly as Harold Pinter (note that he is no theorist) did in his Nobel speech. I have no idea of how the followers of Baudrillard have reacted to the 9/11 event. Is it only a TV image which is frequently shown by different channels? How do the postmodernists explain the global expansion of Islamic terrorism or the transformation of an agent of America into her arch-enemy—Bin Laden? Can it be convincingly explained in terms of Foucaultian concept of dominance and resistance? Post-modernism has announced the death of so many things except its own death — death of the real, death of reason, death of man, death of nature, death of history, death of the author, even death of sexuality. Sometimes I feel that it is like the Indian tantric practice, which needs a corpse as a seat for meditation. Tantric cult is religion. Postmodernism recognises nothing but the seductive charm of consumerism. For the postmodernists America is the Disneyland, a showcase

of the hyperreal. But the terrorist attack on the twin towers has exposed the postmodernist pretension of America, because this attack by the barbarians of the pre-modern world has made the American Government more modernistic in her nationalistic solidarity, her xenophobic complex in enforcing more stringent immigration laws, and her arrogant display of the role as the moral police of the world politics. If you deny rationalism its due and then condemn the irrationalist action of the religious bigots, you are, then, applying the logic of modernity without admitting it. In fact, today's America is half-modernist and half-postmodernist : modernist in terms of civic administration (sanitation and traffic rules) and health care; postmodernist in terms of a celebratory kind of consumerism. Many American academics are quite aware of the gameplan of their post-modern fraternity.

There are still a lot of debate about the relation between modernity and postmodernity or their periodicity, some supporting Habermass in favour of the modernist project, some others taking sides with Rorty's pragmatism. There is even a witty parody of post modernist discourse by a scientist called Alan Sokal, and that was taken very seriously by the magazine 'Social Text', and when he sent an 'Afterword' to the same magazine disclosing his parodic intention, it was not printed, as Ramkrishna Bhattacharya has pointed out in his review of Alan Sokal's book 'Fashionable Nonsense : Postmodern Intellectual's Abuse of Science' (*Bharatiya Samajik Chinton*, Vol. I, No 4, January, 2003). Parody or spoof is, however, a post modernist game, so who is afraid of Sokal? At least, we are not.

Most of our Indian Pomos speak as if they are all Americans, as predicted by Jimmy Porter in *Look Back In Anger*, and postmodern Americans at that. For they denounce modernity for its failings with more

vehemence than their American gurus. They speak of the Holocaust, but keep silent about the first use of atom-bomb by the American government on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two cities of Japan which were punished for the Japanese air force that attacked the American base at Pearl Harbour. If the slaughtering of the Jews by Hitler's soldiers shows the death of rationality, why don't we accuse America of a similar genocide of innocent people in Japan, a country that has nothing to do with anti-semitism? The Christian Europe has a long tradition of persecuting the Jews, but after the second world war the Jews were given their homeland not in Europe, but in the Middle East, and imperialist conspiracy saved the Christian Europe by generating an endless conflict between Palestine and the newly formed Israel. The break-down of the grand narrative of history comes in handy for the Anglo-American imperialism to locate the site of perpetual religious conflict at a safe distance. It is an irony of history that today's Islamic Terrorists have turned against the Western Christian World which looks like a reenactment of the medieval war between two religious communities.

Our Indian postmodernists seem to be rather 'hyperrealistic' about such a political scenario of the unipolar world dominated by America. This is the reason why they are more preoccupied with postmodern literature and other cultural practices. But even here they differ from their American counterparts in a number of ways. They reject the modernist distinction between high culture and mass culture, but in their personal tastes, they are unashamedly elitist. Ask them about the latest trend in the Bollywood cinema, and they will give you a blank look. Ask them about the TV serials that captivate the masses for years, and they will just plead their ignorance. They know much more about what is going on in the show-business of America, the theme parks and the

baffling architectural experiments in American cities. But they have nothing to say about the yawning gulf between the Indian metropolitan cities with their shopping malls and multiplexes and the Indian villages which lack the basic amenities of modern life. Even in the metropolis people here fill their bladders with Coca Cola or Pepsi, but there are not enough toilets around.

This is where the Indian Pocos appear on the scene. They speak of hybridity, in-betweenness, centre and margin, and the third world cultural differences and heterogeneity. But most of them thrive on the western sanction of their fractured Indian identity. Pomos and Pocos have neatly divided their work, following two different routes to reach the same destination — a platform for globalization, which is supposed to strike a balance between the global and the local, or sometimes to merge the two, called glocalization.

While Indian postmodernists think of America or the West as the object of their research, Indian post colonialists, articulating the suppressed voice of the marginalised people, proudly flaunt their American or British connections. Some of them still boast of their western degrees, and prioritize Indian writings in English as a marker of post-colonial Indian culture, by ignoring the vernacular literatures. We have no one like Ngũgĩ Wathing'o to challenge this neo-colonial agenda. Our Pocos would be only too glad to accept Salman Rushdie's judgement that the only Indian literature that matters today is Indian literature in English. This looks like a re-enactment of the Macaulian drama in postcolonial terms.

Some Indian Pocos are always preoccupied with the problems of diaspora, and their agenda excludes the people who still live in India. Gayatri Spivak who is concerned with the third world women, particularly the tribal women via Mahasweta Devi's writings, has challenged the subaltern historicism led by Ranajit Guha

by asking her famous question, 'Can the subalterns speak?' Nobody asks her whether she is ethnically the right person to offer even a negative answer, or why she chooses Mahaswata Devi who speaks for the subalterns instead of Adyoyita Malla Barman who wrote about his own Malo community in *Titash Ekti Nadir Nam* which was made into a remarkable film by Ritwik Ghatak? Our postcolonial studies takes no notice of this novel when Amitava Ghose's, *The Hungry Tide* becomes a talking point.

For both our Pomos and Pocos Indian vernacular literatures can be conveniently marginalised to canonize those Indian writings, which have been awarded Booker or Pulitzer prize. Their main interest lies in a kind of bridge building between the West and India that allows communication only through English. However much they talk of cultural differences, pluralism, ethnicity, erosion of national boundaries, all this has to be conveyed through English, and our Anglo-American sponsors have no obligation to know and understand the linguistic diversity of India with a sense of similar urgency. The ultimate result is a postmodern re-incarnation of old orientalism and a postmodern show of fake resistance. The whole affair is conducted by a series of language games which can be understood only by those who participate in it. It is an academic exercise ritualistically performed in the Indian academia by the diktat of the UGC to acquaint us with the latest theories in America, no matter whether they are a help or hinderance to our perception of the Indian situation. Thanks to the academic powers that be in New Delhi, Indian professors have now learnt to speak with a forked tongue. They have no obligation to mean what they say at the seminars, for the escape route is always open for them to slip where they can have the best of both worlds — postmodern American and the not-so-modern India.

DOUBLE TIME IN *GORA*

RAMKRISHNA BHATTACHARYA

The relevant details of Gora's birth and the subsequent events of his life are provided adequately in the text itself. It was in 1857, during the Sepoy Mutiny that his mother, a European Lady, gave birth to him at Etwa (now in Uttar Pradesh). Her Irish husband had already lost his life in the battle against the Sepoys.

The narrative time of *Gora* can be dated with certainty as occurring during the early years of the 1880s. Rabindranath does not specify the exact year but there is internal evidence enough in the novel to fix the time. Keshub Chunder Sen was then alive (he died on 8 January 1884). Binay often went to the Nababidhan Brahmo Samaj hall to listen to Sen's lectures (chs. 4, 9). There are references to the rumour of a feared Russian invasion (ch. 41), the Civil Marriage Act of 1872 (ch. 52), etc.

What is more interesting is that Rabindranath often digresses to remind the reader of a difference between *then* and *now*, the time of writing the novel (1908-10). Far-reaching changes took place in Bengal after the early 1880s. This is why Rabindranath keeps reminding his readers off and on that wearing chemise (an undergarment) or blouse with saree was still a novelty. Even though the custom had already been introduced by the New Party (*nabyadal*), that is, the moderns, elderly housewives use to consider it as a mark of Christian practice (ch. 3).

We are told that there were only one or two Bengali ICS cadres then (ch. 10).

Satish offers five mangosteens to Binay (ch. 8) and Rabindranath utilizes this incident to tell his readers that the fruit from Burma (now Myanmar) was not easily available in Kolkata then.

When Labanya shows the copies of the English poems she has made, Rabindranath pauses to remind the reader that in those days it was no mean achievement for young ladies to copy out Moore's poems in cursive script with the title and the first letter in roman (ch. 10).

Rabindranath cannot suppress a bout of nostalgia in describing the strand of the 1880s: "The Ganga and her strand were not yet fettered by the railway lines on the bank and the bridge over the water; the ugliness of hungry commercial civilization had not yet invaded them. In those days the dark breath of the city in the winter evening did not envelope the sky so intensely. The river then brought the message of tranquillity in the midst of the hurriedness of Kolikata, smeared with dust" (ch. 21).

Quite casually we are told that Binay was reading out the newly published *Banga-darsan* of Bankim to Anandymayi (ch. 36).

Living aside these minor pointers, we may also note

the more significant ones: Paresbabu used to study the *Gita* and Rabindranath observes, "At that time the *Bhagavad Gita* was not discussed among the English-educated gentry in Bengal" (ch. 16).

We are also told that there were very few girls' schools in Kolkata then; there were only some negligible *pathsalas* and ladies of gentle families were yet to come forward to work as teachers (ch. 44). In the same chapter we learn that the fame of Paresbabu's daughters concerning their learning was widespread. "Such was the fame that it surpassed truth beyond all proportion."

After Gora's release from jail, Abinas planned to give him a surprise by garlanding Gora : a young boy was made to read a message of congratulation. Rabindranath comments: "Such vagaries were not current at the time we are speaking of " (ch. 53).

Thus the manners and customs, the issues of controversy and the turn of events in the early 1880s are presented as matters of some irretrievable past that the readers of 1908-10 would find strange and even unbelievable in some cases. This is why Rabindranath interrupts his narration to remind his readers from time to time that he is not dealing with the contemporary Bengali society. By that time the role of Nababidhan Brahmo Samaj has been taken over by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (founded in 1878). The Hindu society already accepted and adopted many innovations initiated by the Brahmos. There were Haranbabus in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj too, though they did not appear in *Gora*. The Civil Marriage Act was still a taboo for inter-religious marriages, since both parties had to declare themselves as non-Hindus.

But the most momentous event that caused the greatest change in the mindset of the Bengalis—whether Hindu or Brahmo—was the Swadeshi Movement (1905), at the

impact of which the centre of gravity of the Bengali society shifted from social reforms to politics. Prior to 1905 there were social reformers, both Hindu and Brahmo on one side, and the orthodox Hindu on the other, who opposed all reforms. This division was not based on any political line. There were loyalists on both sides. But after 1905 the basic contradiction that emerged was between the pro-Partition and anti-Partition groups that cut across the old division of reformers vs. anti-reformers. Not that everyone who opposed the partition of Bengal was in favour of the abolition of British rule. There was a contradiction between the Moderates (led by Surendranath Banerjee) and the so-called extremists (led by Bipin Chandra Pal). Then there were the young Bengali revolutionaries with Aurobindo Ghose (later Sri Aurobindo) as their mentor. They worked with the extremists but kept a separate identity by proclaiming complete independence as their goal. Aurobindo Ghose felt that priority should be given to political freedom; otherwise, the old quarrel over social issues would adversely affect the new awakening. In an article entitled "Party and the Country" (1908) he wrote:

"No attempt to affect social reform for its own sake has any chance of success because it will at once reawaken the old bitter struggle between the past and the present which baffled the efforts of the reformers."

Bhupendranath Datta also recalls how the new platform of nationalism rendered the old division between the orthodox and the new youth (*nabyayubak*) totally superfluous. With the inception of the Swadeshi Movement, the orthodox Hindus endured the non-Hindu-like bearings of the new youth and the new youth too revered the orthodox in so far as they shared the same platform against British rule. The questions of idolatry, polygamy, etc. were left aside.

It was at this juncture of the new polarization that

Rabindranath wrote his *Gora*. Hence he felt it necessary to remind his readers that he was speaking of the earlier stage of polarization when the social reformers and revivalist Hindus were at loggerheads, political issues being of little or no importance.

The use of the double time in *Gora* therefore became a necessary device for Rabindranath to adopt. We should not forget that Hindu revivalism of the 1880s and '90s never appealed to Rabindranath. He polemicized against the whole movement in no uncertain terms in his poems and sketches. Yet he did not fail to notice the political undertone, the strong anti-British feeling that the revivalist movement carried with it. *Gora*, it should be remembered, was not a religious bigot. He frankly admits to Sucharita that he never sought God (ch. 60). It is the Hindu society, warts and all, that he wants to preserve in order to save it from the denationalizing influence that came in the wake of an alien rule. *Gora* in his adolescent days was a patriot first. He used to recite the patriotic poems of Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and Rangalal Bandyopadhyay. A natural leader, he developed as an orator in English. But he had no sympathy with the manners and customs of the Hindu society and often poked fun at them. It was in course of his polemics with an English missionary in a newspaper that he became a defender of Hinduism as such (ch. 5).

Gora is often misunderstood to be a religious revivalist. But Rabindranath makes it pretty clear that ever since his boyhood *Gora* was a patriot and it was his patriotism that led him to become a Hindu *social* revivalist. Unlike Sasadhar Tarkachuramni, he was not a professional propagandist of the Arya Dharma Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Propagation of the Aryan Religion); he was not in any way connected with the then organs of revivalism, such as *Bedabyas* or *Bangabasi* or *Prachar*. He founded his own Hinduhitaishi Sabha (Society for

the Welfare of the Hindus) quite independent of others (ch. 2). He had nothing but contempt for the fashionable patriots who had no faith in themselves and hence could not demand anything strongly (ch. 4). He used to write his own pamphlets and preach his own doctrine of social Hinduhood, not the religious one (ch. 39). This is very much reminiscent of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's doctrine of Hindutva. The very personality of Gora, in fact, resembles much of Upadhyay's.

It is therefore no wonder that Rabindranath chooses Gora to be Irish rather than English, even though Gora's father was an officer in the British army that fought against the mutineers. Ireland then (1908) was as much a colony as India, and the activities of the Irish freedom-fighters were highlighted and warmly appreciated in the Bengali nationalist press.

DEATH AND DEPARTURE : MEETING DOM MORAES

SANKARLAL BHATTACHARJEE

These are the first six lines of a poem "Figures in the Landscape" — from Dom Moraes' first book of poems *A Beginning* —

'Dying is just the same as going to sleep,'
The piper whispered, 'close your eyes,'
And blew some hints and whispers on his pipe :
The children closed their eyes.

And gravely wandered in a private darkness,
Imagining death to be a way of looking.

I had nearly forgotten these lines from his first book when I met Dom in Kolkata in the last year of his life and asked why his travels in a fractured land, meaning India, put into a book *Out of God's Oven* had to begin

with a chapter called "Leaving London." Dom, as usual sucking at a long cigarette precipitously dangling from his lips, smiled and said as he shakily autographed my copy of the book : "Since it's all about displacement. Imagining departure as a way of looking".

I still cannot figure out why that afternoon every now and then we came round to talking about death and departures. One reason of course was the beautiful paragraph he had written of his father's departure and death in the aforesaid essay on London. But the other, and more important, reason could have been his information, which he hid from me, that his days were numbered. He, it seemed, didn't mind that we talked so little about the book *Out of God's Oven* and so much of its opening essay, which brought out with such poignancy his estrangement from the one city he could have called his own. When I asked why his father decided to live his last years in London he uttered the very same sentence he had written in the essay: " I haven't the faintest idea." And then he put a very pointed question: "Why do you ask me to repeat something I have already said in my writing?" To which I replied: "Because I like to listen to you endlessly quoting from yourself. You never fail to do it."

Dom, I'm sure, did not fail to notice in this repartee the great admiration I bore for the style and content of his oeuvre, which was seeing himself through himself in and out of himself and always himself. The entire corpus of his writing, combining both verse and prose, add up to a loosely structured autobiography, which also, significantly, offers a rollicking script of his time and place. Everything Dom wrote ended up in autobiography and all talk of death and departures eventually veered to his own death and displacement.

We may first consider the lines he writes about his father. His father Frank, who was very Indian and very

successful in his career as a journalist, on retirement chose to spend the rest of his days by himself in London surrounded by memories, memorabilia and his son's books. He lived just two years. Dom writes: 'Whenever I have visited London after my father died, I have gone to look at the house where he last lived. This is a rather grand house in a Bayswater Square. I look at the house for a while through the taxi window, before I ask the puzzled driver to go on. It is the only monument left to my father's loneliness.'

I asked Dom if he had plans to retire to somewhere before dying. Strange, even after this he did not disclose that he was fast dying and that it was far too late in the day to plan a final transit camp. Instead he said two very charming things; one: he wouldn't mind dying among the aborigines of New Guinea and, two: tough not in any athletic fitness, he was still doing a lot of running around. This running around turned out to be his hectic travels in northern and western India to dig up material for his book with Sarayu Srivatsa on Thomas Coryate's historic walk from England to India in the year 1613. So Dom, who a few years ago on a certain Sunday had watched London, once his city, pass by with detached sadness, was back again in Odecombe in Somerset to launch his book *The Long Strider* shortly before his death. On hindsight I get a feeling that he hid his fatal ailment not to stop me from bringing up themes like death, dirge and derangement.

Addicts of Dom's prose pieces journalistic or artistic, laced as they are with superb humour and pinch, would hardly suspect the depth and horror of the pain from which it all emerged. Born into a family with a much preoccupied and largely absentee father and an insane and violent mother, Dom had all the classic ingredients of an autobiographical novel at hand when he started out into poetry. In all his life he wrote just one novel,

which he regretted having written at all. But he spread his life's experiences generously over all his poetry and much of his personal prose, which share a subtle archaeological activity—digging of the mind. Like poetry in his tender boyhood (he reminisces in "Leaving London": "I was by now going to school, which helped keep me out of her way. But I had now also started to feel an obscure but powerful need to write poetry. This required that I sit still with a pen and paper in one place, which had of necessity to be my room"), wit and humour was an escape from circumstances. Ten years after that brilliant debut (his first collection *A Beginning* earned him the Hawthornden Prize) when he stopped writing poetry for seventeen years his prose grew im journalistic cynicism, but still retained its levity and impish verve. In his last book, *The Long Strider*, I feel he found that serenity of expression that comes with a reasonable escape from self. Dom had harboured the will to write a book on Coryate for fifty years and only launched into it when writing was no more a passion or escape but a job that helped pay the grocer's bills.

Even then Thomas Coryate reflected a part of himself, the Dom without permanent liaisons or address and trammelled with a constant need to keep tramping. Like a lonely traveller as Coryate, Dom too wore a sad face in his last years, which like quite a bit of his poetry and prose, I now find unforgettable.

Besides death and departures, Dom spoke a good deal on madness. It began with his caustic remarks about poetry as a form of madness for some and a supple system for others. When I wanted to know what it was in his case he kept silent for a while and then made the vague comment that poets would not be half as interesting without some corny features.

I mentioned the genteel and proper Eliot to whom Dom

had been to with his earliest poems. "He liked my pieces but said that just twenty poems wouldn't make a book," said Dom, and then added as if to bring the odd part out from under the Eliot image: "Then just when I was fearing that my time was out he enquired if I drank. 'It's five o'clock and I must have my gin.' I said that I'd be only too glad to share his gin. And out came a bottle of Beefeater's from his handbag and we settled down to drinking in his chamber.

"But that was only the beginning of our drinking, for as soon as we had downed the bottle Eliot asked if I'd join him for further booze in the pub. The pub that he took me to turned out a very sleazy one with a very strange mix of clients. The way the crowd kept yelling 'Hi Tom!' rather confirmed that the joint was one of Thomas Stearns' regular haunts. Eliot took me to a far corner and ordered more gin. And then after a couple of glasses suddenly remembered something and said, 'Do walk out to the phone booth and make a call to my wife, tell her we are busy with your poems and that I'd be back soon.'

'When I had said just about this I heard Mrs Eliot from the other end, 'If you are in Tom's office then why do I hear you dropping coins into a box? I know where you are precisely and I want you to tell Tom that if he did not turn up at our doorstep within half an hour then the door will not open for him tonight.' No sooner had I reported this to the great man he fast settled the bill and dashed out of the pub. In his haste, I noticed, he had left behind his valise, which I duly picked and ran after him. By the time I caught up he had hailed a taxi and was describing his route. And then he turned round to say 'goodbye' and saw me holding his bag 'How come my valise is in your clutch?' he asked, still wondering how had it all happened. 'You had left it behind in the pub', I clarified.

He said, 'You ought to have told me that, I would have gone back to collect it.'

"I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say. Eliot then drew his drunken body to its full height and said in his authoritative style, 'Remember, you are a poet, and a poet does not carry anybody's bag save his own.' He then went into the cab and vanished in the dark. So that much for your genteel and proper Eliot," said Dom with a crooked smile.

I remembered having seen this smile of his on an earlier meeting — only a few shades wickeder — when I had brought up the topic of Khushwant Singh. We were discussing the flamboyance of the memoirs of poets and I told Dom how Khushwant had reacted to an anecdote given by him in one of his books. It stated that Leela Naidu, then wife of Dom, was helping Khushwant to do some shopping in Hong Kong. Among items Khushwant had to buy were bras for his wife and daughter. As per Dom's version Khushwant did not have the exact sizes of the bras required and cupped his hands over the breasts of the Chinese sales girls and asked for something 'a little larger than yours'. Apparently the sales girl did not take offence and produced exactly what he wanted. It was a good story, Khushwant thought—at his expense.

Dom was still wearing his smile as I recounted Khushwant's grouse and then warmly said, "Of course it's true Khushwant had taken his palms precariously close to the girl's breasts; I had only set them on the skin. Which is very much within the rights of literary recounting. And it's not that Khushwant doesn't know this."

I was still savouring the exquisite Eliot anecdote when Dom spoke again, "You might still want to know if I revisited Eliot. And just in case you do, the answer is 'yes'. But this time with my first book of poems in hand."

I couldn't help asking, "Is it still among your favourite?"

Dom took a sip of coffee and a drag of his long cigarette and looked quizzically at me, "Favourite what?"

"Book of poems," I said.

"No way. They are all rubbish."

'You mean you don't care for any of your many books?' I had to ask.

Then Dom said with classical aloofness: "Whatever be its merit I still am fond of just one of my works: *My Father's Son*."

"But that is prose."

'What's wrong? May be I still like the way it has turned out.'

"But it's for your poetry people will best remember you; isn't so?" I reminded him.

"That's the price you pay for having written poetry that people liked. Nothing else you ever wrote after that can change your image and address."

Dom has described poetry in his short preface to his *Collected Poems 1954-2004* as the hardest and most demanding discipline and a ferocious master. His seventeen years of poetry block, he says, arrived and went away for no apparent reason. The long block he resents as seventeen years of deprivation and he did not want it ever to recur while he was alive. I now find that even as he was trashing his lovely poetry he was still working at it with the last dregs of passion and energy in store to produce those exquisite "New Poems" of 2003-2004. I cannot recall why that afternoon — in between talk of poetry and passion — I put him back to discussing his mother's presence and absence. He said he still had his mother hovering over his memory and invoked her in his poetry. The long last poem (actually a combination of sonnet-like pieces) in *Collected Poems*, titled 'After the Operation,' begins with

such a surrender to the mother image he had fought with all his life:

From a heavenly asylum, shrivelled Mummy,
glare down like a gargoyle at your only son,
who now has white hair and can hardly walk.
I am he who was not I

... ..

That I'm terminally ill hasn't been much help.
There is no reason left for anything to exist.
Goodbye now. Don't try and meddle with this.

In the opening stanza of the third section of the poem Dom rued his imminent death because that would freeze his dialogues with his dead father and his life with Sarayu, his 'closest friend, harshest critic' to whom *Collected Poems 1954-2004* is dedicated. His lines go :

Death will be an interruption of my days, of
all matters pertinent to me, and the private
intimacies I have that cannot be taken away.
It will interrupt my talks with my dead father,
moribund friends, and bent, witchlike trees;
And most of all interrupt what I have with her
who lives and saves me from my lost countries.

Even as we talked of death in the softly lit hotel room and Dom continued to suck his cigarette smoke with trembling lips, arrangements were afoot to have him operated upon. He was still hopeful that he would come by a collaborator to work on a translation of Jibanananda Das' poetry. I now feel foolish why I hadn't prodded him more on Jibanananda, another poet obsessed with death and departures. As a result I don't even know what in Jibanananda appealed so much to Dom that he was prepared to give even his last days to translating him. But strangely as it all happens in poetry Dom in the fifth

section of 'After the Operation' describes an O.T. experience which matches firmly Jibanananda's imagined scene from an autopsy room — "Lash Kata Gharey" (In the Autopsy Room) :

My throat was split open by a surgeon's knife. Though he was a pleasant man, whom I liked when he took the tumour out, he invaded all the private places in my head, and, you, God, giggling, watched. I shall choke on my blood but not to toast you, monster made by man.

The first time I met Dom I had told him how in late school and early years of college we almost idolized him. To which he replied, "I hope you've gotten over that."

"The phase, yes, but the feeling stays."

"You probably know why I am here in Calcutta with Sarayu?"

I said, 'Yes. To shoot a documentary on the city.'

To make it more specific Dom added, "But this won't be Dom Moraes' Calcutta 96. It's actually a look at the remains of the Raj— fact-bound and data-displayed as documentaries go."

"So a trip to the Bowbazar Baijis is off the script?" I asked.

Dom replied, 'What to do? That's another story, about another city.'

'You mean the 'spider city' Calcutta, as you called it in "Gone Away", and this city we are sitting in are two different places?'

"I'll put it this way: The similarities of the past and present cities are vague, and their realities are vague too. They must be held together by memory."

I asked, 'Aren't the memories of two persons of the same thing various too? Like Ved Mehta couldn't remember that knife incident at the Baiji den you described in your book.'

Dom had plucked out his cigarette to enjoy a little laugh and then spoke with naïve candour, "But I did meet up with Ved and settled the issue. What I wrote was no story-making and I still stand by it."

I said, 'Among the remains of the Raj were the excellent floorshows of Calcutta hotels. Those cabarets too are no more.'

"Of course, of course," Dom nodded, "and among the best cabaret dancers ever seen anywhere in India was a girl from here. Luscious Lola."

I cannot describe what joy Dom's complimenting Lola brought me. Lola whom I knew in boyhood as Lauren Swinton and grew up watching practising her steps from my attic window in central Calcutta! I told him this and asked, "Will there be any reference to those long lost cabarets?" And he said, "I am afraid, no." Then casually he put across a query, almost an afterthought: 'And where in the world do you think Lola is?'

I said, "Not the faintest idea."

And Dom sadly closed the issue: "Gone away!"

For the final time I will return to our last meeting at Taj Bengal hotel when Dom had just been through a session of promotion of *Out of God's Oven*. Like I have been saying all along this piece, our conversation simply wouldn't shake out of death or displacement. But Dom did not speak anything of belief, religion or God. His death he was hiding like a private part. Now when I think back on it I seem to know why, since there is textual evidence in the sixth section of 'After the Operation' :

Let me situate this poem in time and space.

It is 15 April 2003; Baghdad has surrendered.

The dictator may be dead; Bush doesn't know.

At the end of his days Dom Moraes must have been a very resigned person. He seemed happy with himself, his lover Sarayu, even with the hordes of hostile

memories of his mother and father. I do not know when he gave up believing, but he didn't seem any the worse for it. I hope he nearly knew he was the best ever Indian poet in English. I wish he lived a couple of years more to see the reader's reaction to the ninth part of his last great poem, which ring, ominously close to some parts of Rilke's "Ninth Elegy" of the *Duino Elegies*, where Dom writes:

History, slow as a sloth, has maintained our race.
One can savour Hitler's slave camps in a film,
But Yahweh did not come to comfort or save.
A towel from Turin shows a fraudulent face.

The creatures I created told me for years
That we would end as we started, by accident,
and turn back into the emptiness of the sky.

P.S.

It is now known that on the night before he died, Dom had talked of returning to the Somerset village of Odecombe and even settling there. On July 19, 2004, on Dom's 66th birthday, 26 of his friends attended a simple ceremony in which a tablet was placed near the entrance to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Odecombe. The 18-inch by 2-ft tablet of Jaisalmer stone read: "Dom Moraes who followed Thomas Coryate's footsteps and returned home." Sarayu, it is stated in the report, sees parallels between Coryate's life and Dom's: "Coryate had to beg for money from (the Emperor) Jehangir and we had to beg for money to complete the book."

The book and Dom's last beautiful poems now complete a lovely, lovely, lonesome life.

TIME, SPACE AND TEXT—AS PICTORIAL CONSTRUCT

MANASIJ MAJUMDAR

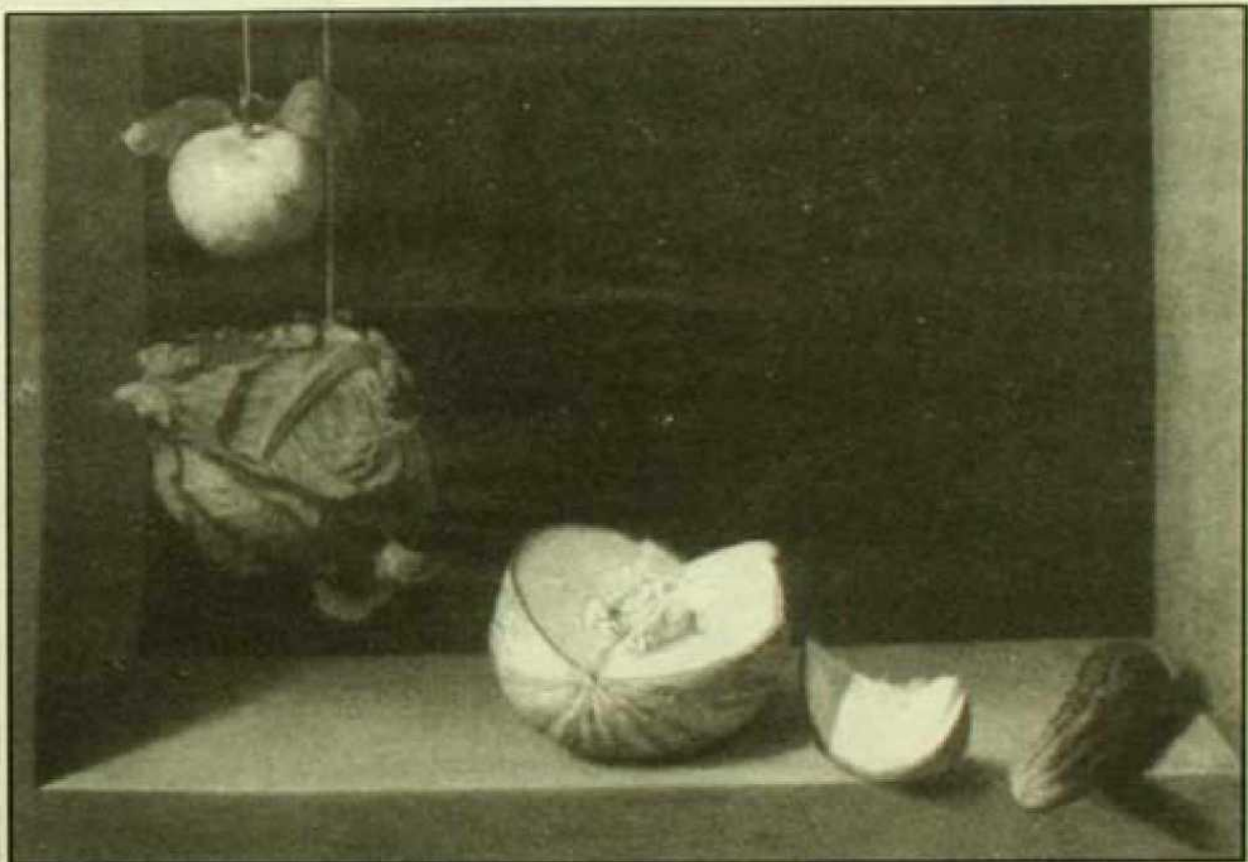
What I am going to discuss in this paper is a brief history of how through ages space and time have been represented in painting and the shifts in the modes of representation. The basic assumption of this paper is that a painting is a representation and as such it is a construct. And to view a painting as a construct is to read it as a text with emphasis on the components of its language such as form, space, colour, line and brushstrokes. In talking of text we are inevitably led to two major sources of our concept of text—New Criticism and Saussurean linguistics. What is common to them is the focus on the role of language in the construction of meaning.

Our awareness of the text began with New Criticism. It gave a new critical tool for a close reading of the text so that there was no longer any need to outsource its

meaning. However, close reading seldom generates new meaning or contradicts pre-existing meaning formation.

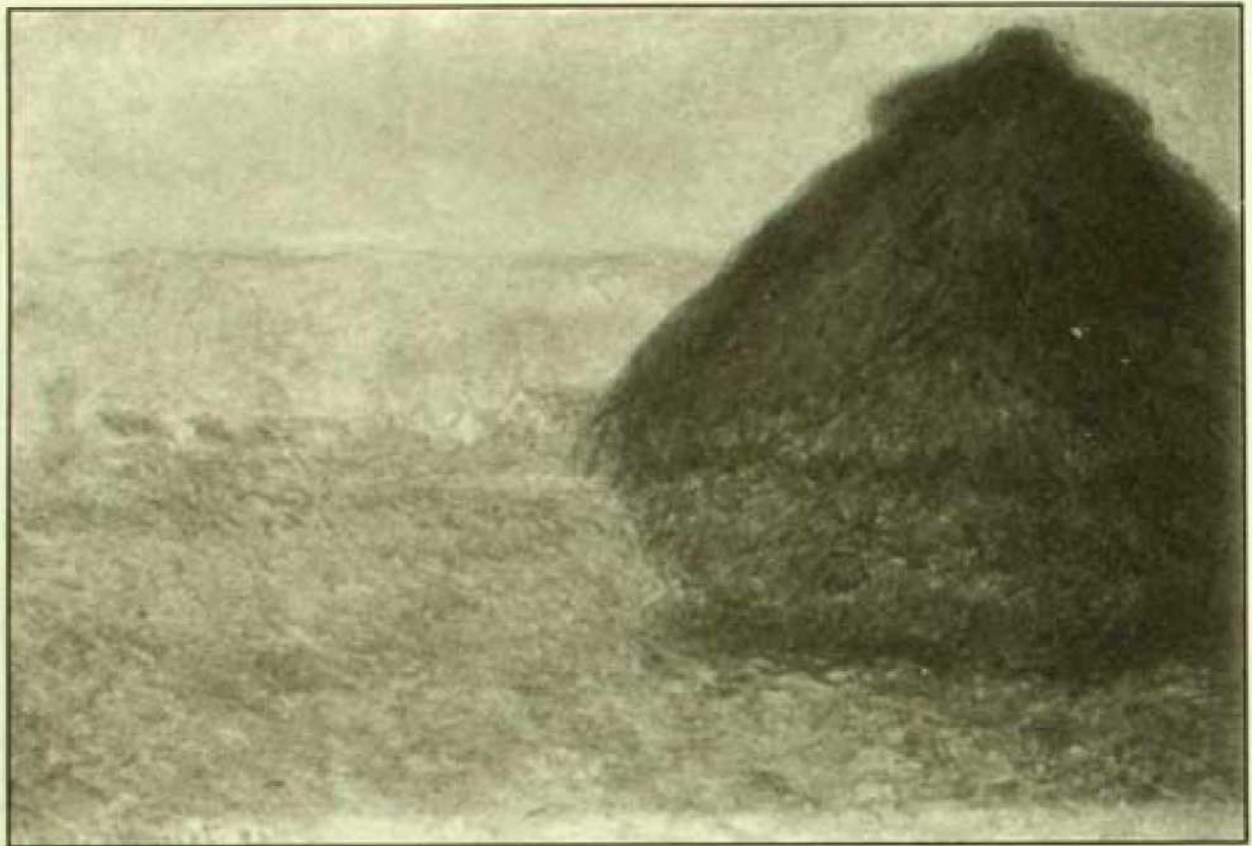
This tie-up between the text and its meaning took a new turn with the rise of structuralist criticism. Saussure's theory about *langue* and *parole* came to correspond respectively to a science of signification and its functional face in all cultural and social sites, whether it is a piece of poem, a work of art or an ad visual. Any meaningful construct in the cultural or social sphere is thus *parole* or, in a very broad sense, *text* in the structuralist discourse. Like *parole*, a text is the instance of the system of signification. In 1964, in his *Elements of Semiology*, Roland Barthes assumed "that an individual utterance—whether the wearing of clothes or the articulation of verbal sounds in a conversation—presupposes a system which ...generates the possibility of meaning for those utterances". A painting is also an utterance and therefore a text and a construct and a pictorial construct at that.

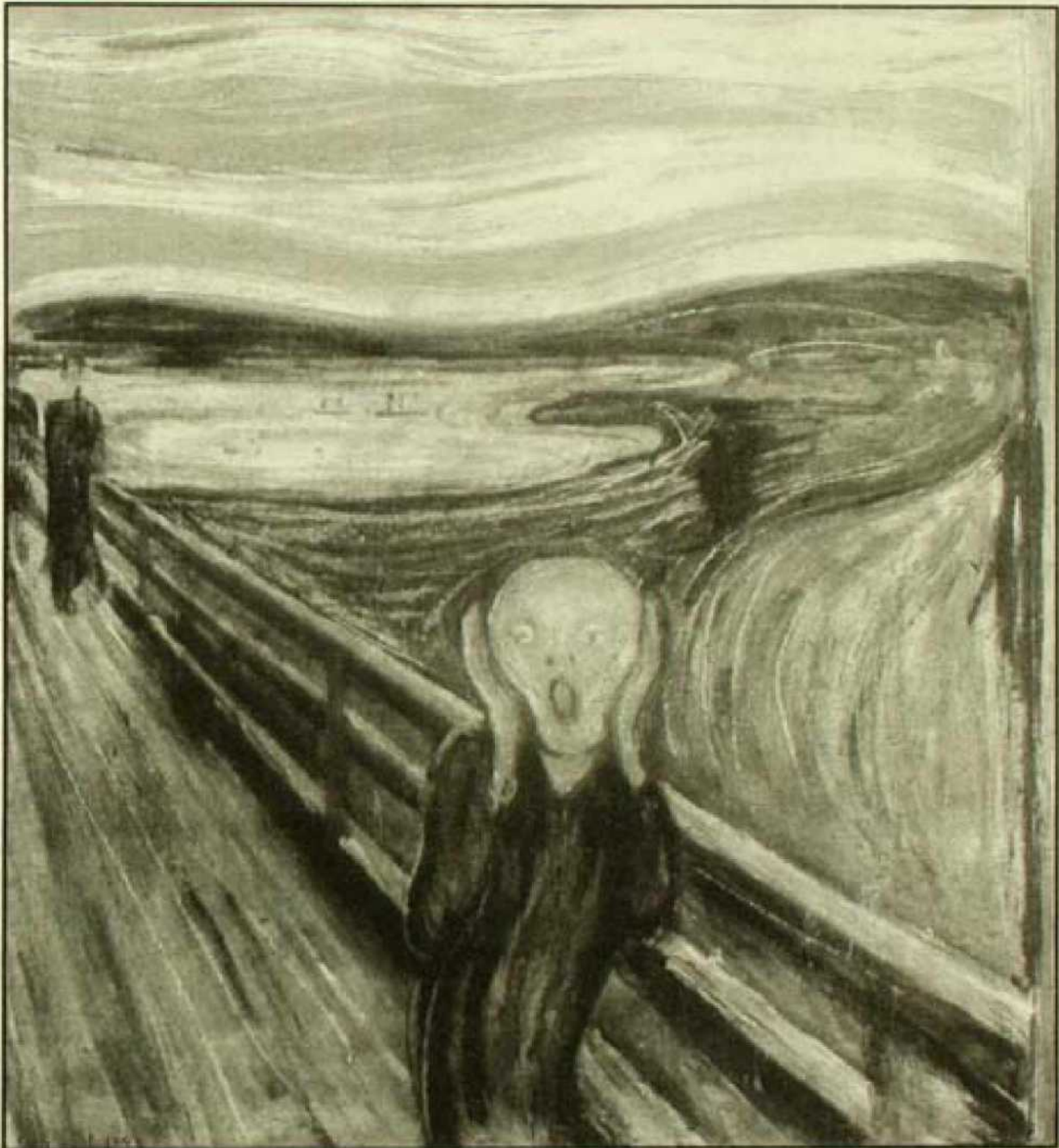
In semiotic discourse the meaning of the text is constructed within the language of the representation using a sign system of interrelation between signifier, signified and the referent. The referent is the thing in the real world, signified is the concept of the referent, which is referred to by the word (signifier). The referent by itself produces no meaning, nor does the author all by himself, since the signifier-signified relationship is rooted in specific social and cultural convention. In a painting pictorial elements—forms, space, colour, line textures, brushmarks etc.—are language components which produce images representing the signified of the real world objects and events, natural or human. And in the pictorial text too the language of visual representation constructs meaning—hence text here is a pictorial construct—within a system of signifier-signified-referent relationship. This approach to read meaning in the pictorial text is semiotic and dates from Structuralism.

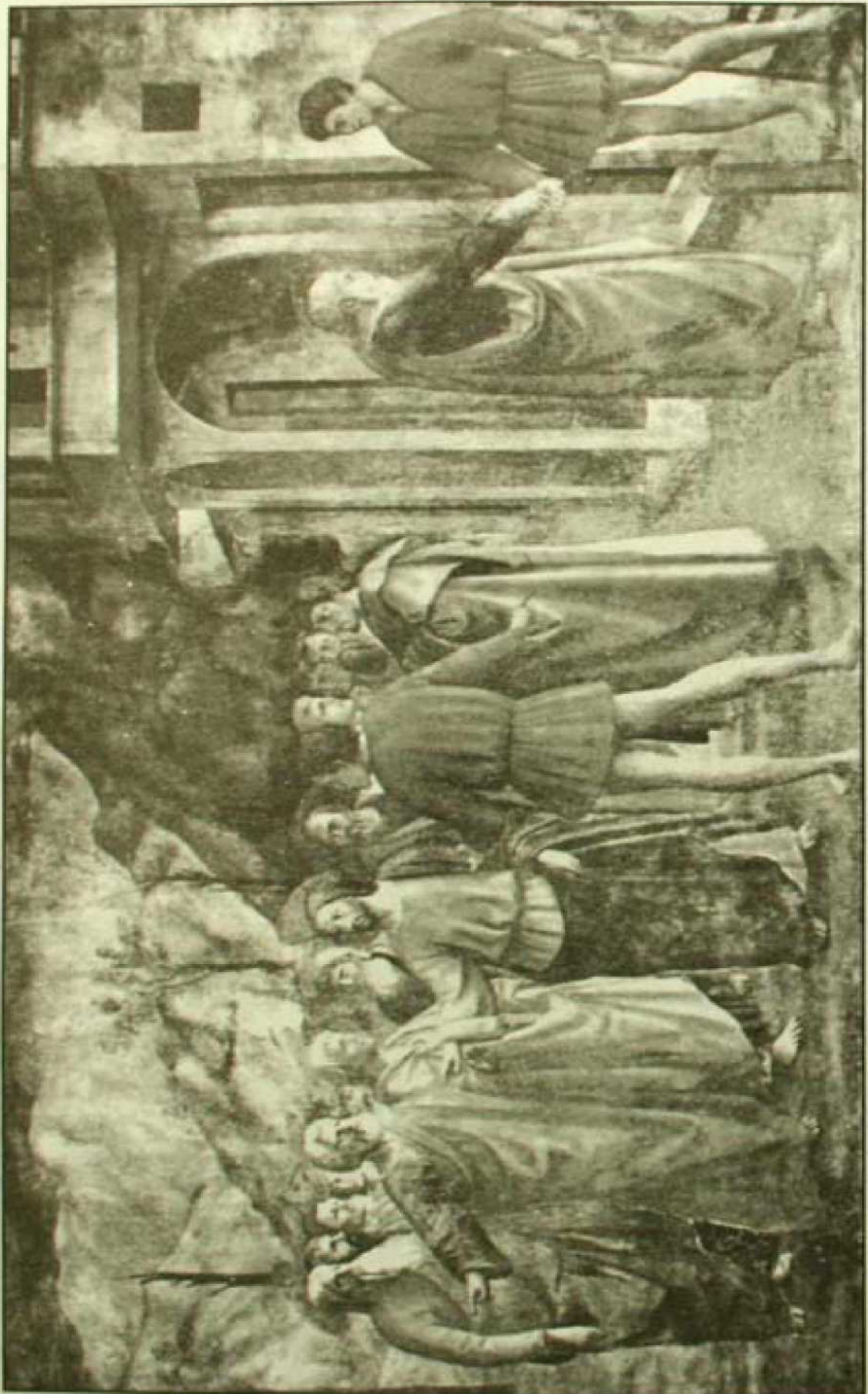














Before that, from the Renaissance till the pre-modernist time, a painted canvas was considered a window through which could be seen the visual reality. Since the technique of realistic representation was perfected, the painter was successful in hiding the materiality of the pictorial language. The viewer could take a portrait or a landscape as an ideal instance of what, since the days of Aristotle, was known as imitation. This is the reflective approach. Another approach was always there but only gained momentum since the rise of individual subjectivity, especially in the age of Romanticism, and was in vogue till probably the coming of post-structuralism. This approach takes the author or the artist or his subjectivity as the source of meaning and assumes that it is entirely intentioned and expressed in language by him. The author's life and time, therefore, often assumed great relevance in the interpretation of the text.

Text is also a configuration of time and space. Time and space have certain self-evident objective characters of which we have, it seems, some inborn awareness. Time flows inexorably onward from the unknown past to an unknown future, hyphenated by the history of the known past and the present of our living experience. The clock is one instrument by means of which we lend time an objective dimension. But it is also subjective. Time flies when you have fun but the dark night of woes never ends. Space, likewise, has certain objective features –shape, direction, area, volume etc and like time, space too, can be measured. Unlike time, however, space seems to stand at the same location. The eternal city of Rome refers not merely to Rome's long history but also to its existence with an implicit reference to more or less the same place, on the bank of the Tiber, where the city has stood ever since Romulus founded it. But we never think that time stands eternally at the same place. Time and space are related to the pictorial text in two principal ways—as

content of the text and as its context; but the two are very complexly interrelated.

It's obvious we cannot think of a painting except in terms of space, as opposed to music, which happens in time. Even the sights we see in dreams or music that plays in a dream certainly comes with the dream-space and dream time. Space or time in dream may be fluid without any rational structure of sequence or dimensions, respectively of the real world time and space. In a dream of a few seconds one might see events of past and future, taking place in more than many locales all jumbled up. And time and space get mixed in dream imagery as in the manner we have in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. Whether or not Coleridge's poem originated in any real opium-induced dream, his poem is not unlike a piece of surrealist painting in which the unconscious mind and world of dreams form the core of visual representation. The poem evokes, though scrappily, enchanted sights occupying vast spaces and events occurring in time. River momentarily flung up, meandering five miles with mazy motions; a woman wailing for her demon lover, the damsel playing on a dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora. These are strong evocative visuals. But the poem is not a pictorial text. What is missing here is the pictorial space. A picture occupies real space and evokes, depending on style, illusionistic space. Spaces evoked in the poem are vivid to the mind's eye but not like space evoked in a painting, which a viewer might feel like entering. The text of the poem in its printed or written form occupies a certain space, no less important a fact as we shall see very soon. But that space is no component of its language. A painting cannot be imagined without its occupying a surface space and the way that space is composed is the essential element of its language. Let me show you two early western paintings to trace how space and time get constructed in a pictorial text.

But before that let me remind you that space has precedence over time in all arts. In fact art *spatialises* time just as history or sociology *temporalises* space. Art is not merely contained by space, it creates subjective space and lends meanings to objective space. Artistic construct freezes the flux of time and fixes it in space. *Kubla Khan* too is printed on a space and even if it was never written but orally handed down from generation to generation, as many ancient epics were, it had to occupy a fixed space in the flux of public or private memory. Music, which has no spatial dimension, is also written and cut in the space of a disc. And music creates subjective space too. It evokes an area of emotional space in the listener's mind, which he inhabits so long as the music is played or performed. It is possible to conceive of timeless space, but not spaceless time in a pictorial construct. Even to tell the time we need the dial space of a clock, a fact that annoyed Bergson, the great philosopher of time as a flux.

The two paintings I have chosen will illustrate the most fundamental modes of representing time and space in a pictorial text and also how historically the mode changes with the change of times from the pre-Medieval to the early Renaissance discourse.

One is a Byzantine mosaic of AD 520 and the other is a fresco of 1425-28 in a church in Florence painted by Masaccio, an early Italian Renaissance old master. Both are religious paintings depicting miracles performed by Jesus. A miracle is a kind of event possible only in a discourse, which assumes the existence of a sacred power and a changeless reality beyond the rational and mortal reality of finite space and time. The pre-medieval artist's problem was to portray the sacred manifested in profane forms. The artist was obviously trained both in the techniques and values of the pagan art of ancient Greece and Rome, which adored and admired the sensuous shapes and forms moving around in a worldly space. He

modelled Jesus and the apostles, clothed them and gave them their postures all modelled on forms and figures as they appear in the panels of relief sculptures on the Greek or Roman temples.

But he carefully gives them stiff gestures and iconic frontality and locates them in a space which has no earthy identity, except the boulders and the unearthly trees on either side to signify that the miracle is happening in the spatio-temporal world. Their foreshortened feet is a fair proof of free objective 3-dimensional space around them but they look static, incapable of free movement and fixed on a two dimensional background space. Space and movement in the old Greek sense are eliminated. Jesus, true to the format of religious iconography, stands calm as the central figure, the still centre, hands stretched out in a gesture of blessing and going to perform the miracle by touching the loaves of bread and the fish offered to him on either side by two apostles. The miracle is represented not as an event but as a token and symbol of Christ's divinity, that is, his *being* not his *becoming* embodied in the power of the church. Accordingly, time stands still, the sacred eternal time. The figures, therefore, are all static. The space is of no local earthly identity. Although a pictorial text of timeless space, it has a temporal context. It is not in the extraneous information of its date but is evident in the Greco-Roman formal values, even though distorted to suit the pre-medieval Eastern Christian discourse. In the looks and clothes of the characters and in the setting there is no trace of the Biblical Palestine where the miracle had happened in the first century AD.

Masaccio's fresco displays the sea change that came over pictorial representation of space in next 1000 years since the date of the Byzantine mosaic. But before I come to Masaccio let me remind you that the medieval artists had a lot of confusion about space. Art historian Gombrich

says they painted what they felt, not what they *knew*, like the ancient Egyptians; or what they *saw*, like the Greeks. This may be true of the early medieval paintings when they produced mostly religious art. But late medieval paintings evoking outdoor space reflect what the artist *saw*, *knew* as well as *felt* all rolled into one. (*Bishop blessing the merchants at a fair* Illuminated manuscript 14th cent.)

God or the Church and the feudal system controlled the private as well as socio-economic life of the medieval people. Time that passed with the church bell striking hours and with the cycle of seasons fixed their life's daily and yearly routine. Nature too was a compulsive but unknowable entity often peopled by mysterious creatures like Geraldine in Coleridge's poem. They saw the vast expanse of external space over which they had no sure grasp except for a tiny part used for farming or habitation. They felt overwhelmed and small in such a space. The medieval artist represented space with nervous awareness of his unsure place in the spatial scheme of things. He was guided partly by this feeling and by his empirical or sensuous experience of space and everything he saw located in it. That is why the medieval artists painted outdoor scenes often with the horizon at the top of the frame evoking a spatial expanse, crowded with natural, human and animal forms each spatially contained and controlled. He would like to paint meticulously each of these forms and figures with a good deal of empirical knowledge about them and a sensuous feel, almost tactile, for their colour, shape and contours. That way they could counter their sense of insecurity and nervousness in that overpowering expanse of external space. What they ignored is the perspectival interrelationship of space and forms in terms of scale and tonal values seen from a single point of view. (Cf. *Babur in Garden*, Babur oversees the making of a garden, Mughal

miniature Baburnama AD 1590 and *Journey of the Magi to Bethelhem*, Benozzo's wall-painting in the chapel of the Medici palace, Florence 1459).

Coming to Masaccio we feel that something like a revolution has happened not only in the representation of space and time but also in the discourse formation of the time. Here is an emerging world order dominated by a very rational and scientific perception of real life space as constructed in the pictorial text. As in the Byzantine mosaic, Masaccio here is dealing with a Biblical miracle meant to project the divine power of Christ with his sacred *being* in the central focus. The picture's iconic affinity is obvious in the placing of Christ at the still centre not only of the group of the apostles but also of the compositional segment of this pictorial narrative. It is a detail from a fresco cycle depicting the acts of Saint Peter. But the miracle is depicted here not as a token or symbol of Christ's divine power and sacred *being*, though that was definitely the conscious purpose of the artist and of the church that commissioned him to do the fresco. It was the time of a paradigmatic shift in discourse formation from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. This is most palpably evident in the space rendered in linear perspective and the human figures in correct anatomical contours. There is a single source of natural light and each character is given lively individuality in expressions and gestures. The characters are sculpturesque and massive, modelled with great appreciation on the sculptures of pagan antiquity. But they are not immobile and fixed on a static two-dimensional space like those in the Byzantine mosaic in which the pagan traditions were appropriated but with great distaste. Here each is an individual standing firmly on the real world space and is ready to move around at will. Compared with medieval paintings this early renaissance frame exudes no sense of uncertainty as regards man's situation in the spatial

scheme of things. The horizon has come down from the heavenly height of the top of the frame to a human level, that is the eye level, at which man stands with confident grasp over a geometrically constructed space. Not only is the space humanised, the time too is given a human dimension. The space evoked in this painting is neither sacredly timeless, nor is time static here but, by all appearances, it looks like historical time, time of change or time of *becoming*. It marks the invasion of eternity by time. 'No religious art ever before fixed the passing of the hour', as Andre Malraux says in his *Metamorphosis of the Gods* (1958). The whole drama of the miracle in four episodes is enacted here from beginning to end, without a jerk in the pictorial management of space-time shift. Outside the city of Jerusalem, the tax collector, at the centre of the picture, demands tribute money and Christ orders Peter to look for a coin in the mouth of a fish in the nearby lake. Some distance away to the left, Peter catches the fish in the lake and at the right he hands over the coin to the taxman. The miracle is rendered almost as a historical narrative, not as a phenomenal revelation of Christ's divinity as we see in the Byzantine mosaic.

Draped in a toga, Christ and the apostles look more like wise Greek elders of antiquity while the sartorial style of those in the Byzantine mosaic was definitely Roman. Probably it became a convention to represent the Biblical characters in clothes of antiquity to suggest a sacred past when miracles did happen. But the setting of the event, the landscape with the lake, hills and cypress trees and the tax collector's office building have nothing to do with Biblical time or geography. They were definitely familiar to the contemporary viewer. And the picture's contemporary context comes out further in a tell-tale detail. It is in the 15th century Florentine wear of the tax collector. This is part of the humanising process of both time and space. The space is constructed as a fact of

familiar nature organised in a manner as if seen by the viewer standing on the same ground as those within the frame. To that end again time too is represented as contemporary so that the viewer might participate in the event as an onlooker.

David Harvey in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990) draws a straight line of connection between Renaissance and Enlightenment solely on the basis of perspectivism. This geometrical organisation of space from a single individual's point of view as in Masaccio's *Tribute Money* and Descartes' construction of the individual subjectivity set apart from the rest of the world—formulation of two distinctly separate entities 'I' and the other—are both highly rational acts of the same nature. The strong logic on which was founded the Renaissance construct of space and time in the pictorial text produced certain fixities. The observer's immobile point of view is one of them. Next is the individual observer. He is none but the artist himself but he takes it for granted that his point of view is valid for all other individuals. There are no multiple points of view. Whoever stood at that fixed vantage point and at that fixed moment, as the artist did, was supposed to find the view the same as the one rendered in the painting. Visual reality, thus observed, comprises a series of fixed forms and spaces producing a linear perspective. Enlightenment logic, too, generated similar fixities—the objective truth, linear progress of history, abstraction of universality, rational basis of all knowledge etc. and each individual subject was thought to have the same rational perception of outer reality. As a result the rational ordering of reality by Enlightenment ran parallel to the rational ordering of space in visual reality in art especially in the centuries from the Renaissance till the middle of the 19th. For every artist, visual reality was out there in its homogenous clarity, ordered in lineal perspective and occurring in a

moment frozen out of the flux of time and the artist was simply to translate it into the transparent mimetic language of art. A painting was just a window on the world minus its frame and glass panes, as in a detail of a window in Robert Campin's *Virgin with Child*, 1430.

It is significant that in India, Ravi Verma created, in the 1890s, a large body of oils in the manner of western academic realism. Academic realism came into vogue in the 18th century following a long line of development of perspectival spatial construct since the Renaissance. Ravi Verma's paintings evoked a solid pictorial reality of India in realistic and rationalized images of Indian epics and myths. That was the time of the emergence of the educated urban middle-class and civil society in India, both registering the rise of the rationalist spirit forming the discourse of early modernity in India.

But both perspectivism and Enlightenment insistence on supremacy of reason, of an invariable objective truth were a totalising process. Tyranny of perspectival construct of space soon came to be resented but before that the Romantics asserted a unique point of view for each individual. John Keats claimed that his job was more difficult, compared to that of his fellow poet Byron, because : "He describes what he sees, but I describe what I imagine."

The romantic artist was aware of the hiatus between his individuality and that of the others. But he was also aware of the unique essence, in his intuitive perception, of *one* truth unifying the subject and the object. As a result he was not an alienated individual. He found the mimetic language good enough for self-expression though he subjectivised it not by any semiotic overhauling but by devices which the Formalists later defined as *foregrounding* and *defamiliarising*, as can be seen in the landscapes of Turner, Constable or Casper David Friedrich. (John Constable: *The HayWain* 1821). The most naturalistic

representation of rural spaces in Constable appears bathed in a visionary glow—in light that was never on land and sea.

But the romantic claim of the uniqueness of each individual perception went a long way to let art go off the hook of reality. The created world of art was no longer bound to be an imitation of the world of perceived reality, which had become a standard practice since the Renaissance invention of the technique of constructing illusionistic space. But there was more to come. Earlier Coleridge had defined poetry as best words in their best possible order. Much later Mallarmé would claim poetry is written with words, not with ideas. Applied to art it would mean a picture is what happens on the surface of the canvas. In fact Maurice Dennis claimed, “a painting before being a battle horse, a nude woman or an anecdote—is essentially a flat space covered with colours in a certain order”. Another German artist declared that it was not the artist’s business to produce a cow, only a cow could do it! Art was now to express more the individuality and subjectivity of the artist rather than represent or re-create the reality out there in the phenomenal world.

This discourse shift began with the Romantics but the mimetic concept and practice of art continued till the 60s of the 19th century. With the Impressionists this modernist discourse formation was nearly complete. I say *nearly* because with Impressionism, Realist art moved further ahead in transcribing visual reality as it is; but by the same route art reached a take-off point of its flight to an autonomous status, breaking off its age-old ties with reality beyond the frame of the canvas. The Impressionists, like Monet, invented their own technique of representing the natural world, adequately transferring on to the canvas the retinal reflection of visual reality. Their technique of laying separate, short, weighty

brushstrokes made a painting look no longer a window on the world outside but primarily a flat surface of canvas smeared with paints (Claude Monet : *Boats at Argenteuil* 1873; Auguste Renoir : *The Path through the Tall Grasses* 1876).

Impressionists did not do away with perspectival rendering of space. But in an age of speedier transport, faster communication and budding photography visual, reality was no longer the same. With the shifting point of view, spaces and forms looked more as a flux than fixed. And more and more, time played a greater role in the shifting appearance of the visual world. Passage of objective time was evident in the change of the quality of light. Light determines the time of the day. And spaces and forms have no uniform surfaces; with the shift in the quality of light, the colours and contours, tones and textures, shape and dimensions of the phenomenal world change also. Atmosphere is another important element that dominates the visual reality. Not only the atmosphere that comes along in a major way with the change in seasonal time but with that of the day time from morning to evening.

In Claude Monet's *Haystack at Sunset* (1891), the artist is interested not in space and form but light and colour in nature. What dominates is the sensation of colour, which dilutes the spatial depth and solidity. Except the haystack the forms in the middle and far distance are almost melting in colour. The line across the horizon can be either the edge of a hillside or the crest of a cloudbank. Thus colour and light being the essence of time-change, we might say here is an instance of how space has been temporalised. But the Impressionist may also claim to have depicted nature more objectively and scientifically as it appears in a flux of time and light. At the same time it is no doubt a unique private vision of an individual observer.

In Van Gogh's *Road with Cypresses* (1890) the perspectival space has been subtly subverted by placing a pair of unusually tall cypress trees flaming continuously upward and going beyond the frame. The sky doesn't look like a sky but a portion of the cosmic space where the sun and the moon are next-door neighbours. And the whole picture plane seems to convulse with tremendous tension and turmoil. No doubt this is more an expression of a troubled mind and soul than representation of outer reality. This is one of the paintings Van Gogh did when he was a patient at Saint Remy's mental hospital.

This subjectivisation of visual reality with formal distortion of space and form takes place under the stress and strain of the artist's private feelings and emotions. He makes an image with identifiable forms and figures taken from nature but knocks them out of shape in contours, stains them with non-naturalist colours and locates them in spaces densely evoked, with no specific regard for perspectivism. The result is a picture charged with a high-pitched expressiveness. The classic instance of such charged Expressionist spatial construct is Edward Munch's famous painting *Scream* (1893). The solid space is rendered fluid with undulating streaks of blue and red making visible the cries of the tormented subject represented by an uncanny figure.

Munch was definitely influenced by Van Gogh. There are striking resemblances between this and the Van Gogh painting, especially in the diagonals of the bridge in one and the road in the other suggesting the spatial depth and the way the textural streaks and strokes create bristly emotive surface in either.

Space in all these three instances is neither static, nor localised. Brushstrokes evoking spaces in them are either shimmering, or pulsating or streaming, and they suggest a flux not only of space but also of time. The words that describe the visible strokes are all time-suggestive—

shifting, shimmering, pulsating flowing or streaming. Thus space in each case is shaped, melded, transformed by time. At the same time the paintings reflect and register the artist's or the subject's unsure grasp of the spatio-temporal reality. The Renaissance and Enlightenment certainty of time and space could no longer be taken for granted.

But why was space rendered fluid, shifting, fragmented and subdued by time? David Harvey has enlisted all the events of technological progress achieved over the decades since 1850 till 1910. "The expansion of railway network, beginnings of radio communication, and the bicycle and automobile travel ... all changed the sense of time and space in radical ways." Social space expanded beyond the local limits, became integrated with spaces across the continent, events came to be known to have taken place at the same time in far flung spaces and what happened in one place had instant fallout in other remote places. The artists couldn't help being aware of the problem of representing multiple and simultaneous temporality of events involving spaces at diverse locations. Virginia Woolf couldn't write a realistic novel in which a narrative would unfold lineally with episode after episode each occurring at a well-defined physical space and time. Virginia Woolf was deeply impressed in 1910 by an exhibition in London of French paintings of earlier decades for which Roger Fry coined the word, *Post-Impressionist*. Paintings done mostly in Pointillist manner gave her the idea of the shower of impressions, which went into the shaping of her interior monologue technique of representing time and space as categories of psychological experience in a complex structure of synchrony and simultaneity.

But by 1907 Picasso had already started revolutionising the mode of representing time and space in a highly compressed form, rendering a synchronised multiple

points of view in a fractured two-dimensional picture plane format. (*Les demoiselles d'Avignon* 1907). Picasso wanted to paint solid forms and figures on a flat space without making it look like three dimensional. Three dimensional space is compressed, flattened and fractured. The curtain behind and the figures in front are split into interfacing angular planes like sides of flattened cubes. As a result, despite being two dimensional, figures and forms do not look flat and yet the space has no perspectival depth. Again, the figure on the left crouches with her back to the viewer but her face is turned round with full frontality. That is, her haunch and her face, seen from different viewpoints are given simultaneous representation by breaking all norms of perspectivism. The painting has a squarish iconic format, like the Byzantine mosaic, with spatial composition ideally suited to the celebration of *being*. It has no horizontal narrative format like that of Masaccio's fresco treating an event of *becoming*. But like Masaccio, Picasso is performing a miracle here. His theme is not sacred, but profane—the *being* and *becoming* of women in flesh trade. He has built a narrative within an iconic format. Except the curtain raiser on the left, all the women pose with iconic frontality but they are neither static nor stiff. One of the two women on the left is a new arrival and therefore fresh flesh with traces of modesty in her gesture. The other is a little mature in the profession. She raises both her hands, so that her breasts heave up more alluringly. But why should this display of the brothel's stock include two elderly prostitutes with ugly horrifying faces? Their enigmatic presence can be explained only in terms of an allegorical narrative. But the narrative sequences are presented simultaneously as in the Masaccio fresco. On the left are the young whores of today, on the right, what they will become tomorrow. There is a documentary evidence that Picasso had earlier seen syphilitic prostitute patients in a

hospital in St-Lazare. The ripe fruits on the table thrust between the two groups interconnect them with a symbolic meaning that, like fruits, flesh too will decay and rot after it ripens in youth. No wonder Apollinaire gave the picture its first title — *The Philosophic Brothel*. The philosophic or the moral message of the painting gains exceptional force because the narrative is given a radically compressed time-space setting to underscore its theme of simultaneous *being* and *becoming*.

Not only Picasso; other modernist masters too wanted to break out of the Renaissance and Enlightenment prison of space. Matisse, for example, found his own mode of evoking curved volumes of figures on flat spaces in his *Pink Nude*. But Picasso wanted to do something more. He painted, as he claimed, not what he saw but what he knew. This was by no means possible in any construct of three-dimensional space. (Picasso: *The Seated Woman* 1937 and *Girl before a Mirror* 1933). Picasso's handling of space and his use of multiple viewpoints are closely related. Western painters born into the tradition of illusionist spatial construct could never approach pictorial space as purely pictorial space as for example our Jamini Roy could do. (*Dancing Gopini*). But then unlike Jamini Roy or even Matisse, Picasso and other Modernist painters resorted to aggressive distortion, or highly privatised restructuring of space and forms. These distortions were prompted by the violent and chaotic times they lived through or by an aesthetic urge to create a pictorial space completely disengaged from the perceived visual reality. A whole generation of artists indulged in a new form of visual representation of space as if appearing in dreams sourced from the unconscious mind, not unlike what Coleridge did in his *Kubla Khan*. (Salvador Dali: *Persistence of Memory* 1931; Giorgio de Chirico: *Piazza d'Italia* 1930; Yves Tanguy: *To construct and Destroy* 1940). But the psycho-physical visuals of their paintings, evoked often with all the illusion

of perspective, generally project spaces haunted, enigmatic and fear-soaked.

I will finally take up space in the abstract pictorial constructs of high modernism. After a rigorous rejection of representation what remains on the abstract canvas is nothing but space and colour. Abstraction in art gradually came up the way modernism unfolded itself since forms and figures began disintegrating into Cubist space (Braque *Woman Reading* 1911, Malevich *The Knife Grinder* 1912). Finally art began to appear not as representation of space but as space in its own right expressed in paint. In fact if early modernism had to do with time so long as it didn't do away with representation of physical space, high modernism's major preoccupation was space because a painting is nothing, as I have mentioned before, but a flat space smeared with paint. Right from the beginning abstract art landed two major basic modes of spatial evocation—cold rigorous construct of space in strict geometric structure which purges from the canvas not only any trace of the exterior nature but also all emotions (Mondrian, *Composition in white Blue Red*, 1936/ 36, 37, Malevitch, *Airplane flying* 1915) and painterly stimulation of spaces in terms of colours in varied tones and shades (*Rhotko No 8*) creating a colour-field suffused with placid emotions or what Kandinsky called inner radiance. Later came abstract expressionist colour-field often with strong or stressful emotive surface. The artist here works out of an unconscious drive, as did De Kooning or Jackson Pollock. Pollock might recall the shimmering surface of the Impressionist spaces. But his spaces bristle with mystery. He creates a dense spatial field with intricately overlapping, enmeshed inter-twining threads of colours that stimulate the viewer's imagination.

We should keep in mind however that abstract non-emotive space is not incompatible with hard-edged realistic perspectivism. Juan Cotan was a 17th century

Carthusian monk living a life of severe self denial. He always painted still lifes with vegetables evoked in the manner of painstaking realism. Though the vegetables are food objects he doesn't locate them on a kitchen table but in a cooling place called cantarero. He composes the forms on the picture plane of austere simplicity as abstract shapes, spherical, cylindrical and elliptical, not as quince, cabbage, melon and cucumber. This is underscored by the geometric structuring of the space tracing a crescent within a square. That space becomes abstract and geometrical, not sensuous and creatural, enlivened with warmth of feeling for fresh vegetables as nourishing food. For he wants his viewer to look at them with interest in their mathematical forms divorced from all associations of consumption. Cotan's still life can be seen against a similar still life by a Dutch painter of the same century. Peter Glaesz too paints a still life with food objects, fruits, bread and wine; very frugal meal no doubt. But the kitchen corner, the table, the glasses, the fruit bowl and the wine flask etc all fill the space with a creatural feel associated with zest for food.

Notes and References

A seminar paper, when published, must be appended to with a long list of endnotes. Mine being no learned paper I will mention only a very few books and articles which I read before writing this paper. Pictures for illustration and primary information about them are gathered from many of them. The sources of comments—often well known—such as those by Coleridge, Keats, Mallarmé, Maurice Denis and others cannot be traced now as the books from which I collected them long ago are no longer in the British Council Library which I used when I had been a regular art critic writing for *The Telegraph* and *Desh*

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THE ADI GRANTH : A GOLDEN TREASURY OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN POETRY

SWAPAN MAJUMDAR

The *Adi Granth* or the *Guru Granth Sahib*, we all know, is the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. What the *Gita* means to the Hindus, the *Torah* to the Jews, the *Bible* to the Christians, the *Quran* to the Muslims, the *Adi Granth* is to the Sikhs, if not something more. Theologians, historians and sociologists have discovered many more striking features in the text worthy of count, to be analyzed and explained by way of explications. But for a student of Literature it offers a feast of comparative explorations on various levels. At the very outset, one is particularly struck by the uniqueness of the text as an anthology of medieval Indian poetry. A literary text may very well attain the status of a holy scripture – as has been the

fortune of the *Gita*, but to create one such from literary sources is not only unprecedented but also without any other example to second it. No other religious system in the world can perhaps boast of its scripture being made up of a treasury of poems culled from a multilingual range of literature.

It was Gautama, the Buddha, who first realized that rather than direct and straight-forward sermons, stories exemplifying morals are far more effective in influencing the minds of the people in following a course of life according to some basic ethical principles. The Jataka tales originated from such a realization. We may say, Guru Nanak went a step further by deploying poetry for the same purpose. And because of the rhythmic structure and rhyming patterns, verses could be more easily comprehended and memorized. Rather than deducing the morals and the visions from the sayings of his predecessors and expressing them in his own words, the Guru thought it wise to give due credit to the earlier thinkers and to create a space for such thinkers in his universe of gospels. The Guru's honesty and humility are all the more revealed in his act of collation of such poems.

It may be true that though in 1669 Guru Nanakdev (1469-1539) initiated his five beloved disciples – *panj pyaras* – into the creed of *Khalsa* – the pure, yet he perhaps never intended to found a new religion. He did not compile the *Granth* either. Both for institutionalizing the faith into an organized religious system and putting together the songs loved, sung and quite a volume composed by the Guru, we owe a debt of gratitude to the fifth Guru of the order, Guru Arjandev (1563-1606). However, for the anthology he did not confine his choice only to such compositions, he added some more composed by the later Gurus.

The Holy Book as we know it today has a tally of 5894

hymns. The greater bulk of the verses – 4957 – are by the 6 Sikh Gurus and 937 from 15 Bhagats, Sants and Sufis, 15 Bhattas and Charanas. There are 976 compositions by Guru Nanak himself, 61 by Guru Angad (1504-52), 907 by Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), 679 by Guru Ram Das (1534-81) and 2216 by Guru Arjan. 118 hymns by Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75) were added later. The precursor and contemporary Bhagats, Sants and Sufis in the anthology include Sheikh Farid (1173-1266), Beni (c1312-?), Jaydeva (1201-), Sadhna (13 C), Namdeva (1270-1350), Ramanand (1366-1467), Sainu (1390-1440), Pipa (c1425-?), Ravidas (1482-1527), Kabir (c1398-1485), Dhanna (16 C), Surdas (1528-), Bhikhan (1480-1573), Paramanand (1493-1593) and Trilochan (1267-1335). Among the Bhattas and Charanas, Kalasu composed the panegyric for Guru Nanak and set the tradition to be emulated by Kalshar (16 C), Kalu, Jalap, Kiratu, Salh, Ganga, Mathura and others relating to the following Gurus.

The art of compiling anthologies was known to the traditional scholars of Indian literatures from early days of its literary civilization. Among the rich corpus of *Samgrahas*, *Satakas*, *Subhasitas* or *Suktis*, Vidyakara's *Subhasitaratnakosa* (12 C), Sridharadasa's *Sadukti-karnamrta* (20 C) stood out as store-houses of poems collected from various sources depending on one or the other consideration or principle. But these were mostly selected from courtly or at least elite literature and their intended readers also belonged to the same class. Among the 36 authors, Brahmins were the majority (18). Kshatriyas were the very next in number (7), followed by Muslims (3), Scavengers (2), Barber, Butcher, Cobbler, Jat, Washerman, Weaver one each (6). The addressees of the *Adi Granth* of course were primarily the subscribers to the Faith, but they also included the non-initiated masses. The expanse of the clientele at large, again, had been as heterogeneous as the cross-section of the poets.

Even as an anthology of poems, the *Adi Granth* has been a novel compilation. Here the poems are classified not in terms of authorship or theme, but in the sequence of the *Ragas* in which the songs were set to tune. That way it also illustrates the concept of mutual illumination of the arts – music and literature in particular. The verses are set on thirty-one principal *Ragas* like Sri, Majh, Gauri, Bilawal, Asavari etc and six more rather less frequently used. Apart from these, more than a dozen mixed *Ragas* have also been deployed in the anthology. To retain the authenticity of the tunes even the scientific mention of *Talas* and *Svaras* have been made. There is no dearth of varieties in poetic compositions as well. The *Sabads* extend from the usual Chaupadi or Ashtapadi upto twenty-four *padas*. The *varas* are heroic in temper. The *Baramahas* are brilliant with colours and decorations of the seasons and the maids. Lyrics set on the same Raga are differentiated like pahre and Banjara in Sri Raga, or Anandu, Sad, Dakhni Omkar and Sidh Gosati on Raga Ramkali and the like. The spectrum of allusions and proverbial references to Puranic characters, stories or events interspersed in the narrative framework also lend diversity to the anthology. The episodes of Ajamal, Pingala the prostitute, Draupadi, Dhruva, Prahlad, Sudama, Savari or the proverbial allusion of stone-chip floating on water or the mighty elephant of Bhagavata are used to illustrate the values or the lack of these in keeping with the Guru's ethical preaching.

In the *Adi Granth* were compiled hymns of religious preachers belonging to various faiths and classes of India, excepting only those from the Dravidian group of languages, quite understandably due to linguistic inaccessibility. The most important feature of the collection is its catholicity. In the domain of religious poetry, the differences between the Bhakti and Sant poets are often glossed over in modern times; or even within

the fold of Bhakti, the mutual antagonism among the Saivas, Saktas, Virasaivas, Vaishnavas, Warkaries, not to speak of the rivalries within Great Traditions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and their combined enmity with Islam are hardly remembered and are all clustered together under the rubric of a monolithic Bhakti upheaval prioritized as a dissent movement against the Brahminic authority. Such a broad-brush portraiture has obliterated the complexities in the study of medieval Indian literature and the consequent simplification has also jeopardized the perspective in which a poet and a preacher like Guru Nanakdev sought to effect a balance both within the inter- and the intra- domains of religious practice and philosophy.

The Preceptor was a keen observer of his times. He knew, "The age is a knife. Kings are butchers. They dispense justice when their palms are filled. Decency and laws have vanished, falsehood stalks abroad." Babar, the Mughal, invaded India in such a bleak and decadent situation. Perhaps it may not be unjustified for a reader to suppose that the Guru was trying to reorganize the Indians emotionally through the common bonds of poetry and morality. The religion he had in mind, therefore, was not an exclusivist one; it tried to bring in believers of as many faiths and people belonging to various sects. The *Adi Granth* may be justifiably cited as an illustrious example of the fact that the medieval Indian poetry is not essentially revivalist and restricted to the wider ambit of Hinduism, nor is it entirely a product of the dissent against Brahminic authority. The Book, if read carefully, may convince us of the integrity and unity of Indian thought and culture which is basically assimilative in nature. Perhaps this aspect may call for a valid comparison between the tenets of the *Adi Granth* and those of Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi. One might wonder whether

the Emperor could ever conceive of such a formulation had there not been a text of this magnitude preceding him.

The collection also strikes even a lay reader as inexplicable on another count. There can not be any denying the fact that the poems put together in the *Adi Granth* are ostensibly religious both in temper and tone. Yet the intention and the purpose the collector had in mind were secular in spirit. Apparently this is a flat contradiction in terms. If anything, the *Granth* tries to lay down certain moral principles of living. In this respect the cardinal philosophy of Sikhism demands a close comparison with Buddhism which also upholds religion as a way of life. Again, like the Buddha, for Guru Nanakdev, *Ahimsa* was the key principle of a good and happy life. For him, *Ahimsa*, forgiveness, endurance and helpfulness are decidedly the most important virtues and interconnected among them. According to him, *Ahimsa* may be of three types: (1) *Ahimsa* of thought: never wish evil for anyone, (2) *Ahimsa* of speech: never speak ill of any one and (3) *Ahimsa* of action: never harm any one. He also advised to forgive the one who speaks ill of you, to endure physical, moral and spiritual torture and to help people in distress even if at the cost of your life. The last three may also be considered as variations of Forgiveness which by themselves are but forms of *Ahimsa*. These he elaborated when asked by Ajita Randhawa about the nature of *Ahimsa*. Though Gandhi might have been more under the influence of Tulsidas and Narsi Mehta, yet the similarities between the Guru and the Mahatma in formulation and classification of the principle of *Ahimsa* require to be studied in depth from a comparative aperture.

The *Adi Granth* internalizes the entire universe. The Guru sings: 'As fragrance abides in the flower, / As the reflection is within the mirror, / So does the Lord abide in

thee, / Why search Him without?' [Todi, M 9] In *Japuji* of Guru Nanakdev, we come across five *khands* or five sections like Dharam Khand, Jnan Khand, Saram Khand, Karam Khand and Sach Khand. Dharma, Karma or Jnana have been the three staple objects of search in life according to the Indian scriptures. But the Guru dispels the concepts of original sin and virtue: 'When the world of form was not born, / Where was sin and where was virtue then?' [Sukh, M 5] And: 'Why blamest thou others, blame thy deeds: / For thou receivest the fruit thou sowest.' [Asa, M 1, Patti] So deeds make us ashamed or blessed. The inclusion of Saram and Sach Khands prove, the Guru knew well that unless the demerits in the self are realized from within and eradicated from the root, one can not attend the Truth. Moreover, realization for the sake of it is not enough; when and only when that realization creates a feeling of shame within, in one's inability to grasp the True and the Right then and only then, out of that humility and transparency of mind can one move towards the Good which then emanates from its hibernation to reality.

The only ritual referred to in the *Adi Granth* – if that may be called a ritual at all – is that of *namasmarana*. The Guru exhorts: 'The Name informs all creatures, all beings, / The Name informs all worlds, all universes.' [Gauri, Sukh, M 5] The devotee is advised to immerse his awareness in the name and realization of God. But the Guru cautions: 'Everyone utters the Name of the Lord, but by mere utterance one realizes Him not, / When, through the Guru's Grace, the Lord is enshrined in the mind, one gathers the Fruit.' [Gujri, M 3] Because 'the True Guru, / ... speaketh what he seeth.' The name of Hari is recurrent in these verses, followed by those of Rama, Prabhu, Gopala, Govinda, Parabrahma, Thakur, Karta, Data etc. No less than 36 such epithets are found throughout the Book. It is interesting to note that though

they may have been used by worshippers of the *Sakara* and *Saguna* schools, these refer to *Nirakara*, *Nirguna* and *Nirupadhika* qualities of the God. In other words, the *Granth* here displays catholicity by appropriating poets as well as their Gods from the other faction of the devotees in medieval Indian literature thus resolving the age-old differences between the two groups. The hymns, therefore, may also be dubbed as 'hymns for the drowning' in the true tradition of Indian religious poetry right down the course from Nammalavar.

The use of numerical figures as allusions abounds in the *Adi Granth*. And in this respect, too, an assimilation of the Indian and the Islamic traditions are quite transparent. For example, if the number four refers to the four Vedas, four ages – Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali – or the four *Asramas* – Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Banaprastha and Sanyasa, these also at places denote the four ways of the Sufis, viz., *Sariyat*, *Tariqat*, *Rafiqat* and *Haqiqat*. Similarly, the figure five denotes the five senses – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin – or the five sources of waywardness – lust, anger, desire, infatuation and pride, simultaneously these numbers at others also allude to the five *waqts* of Namaz, viz., Namaz Subah, Namaz Teshin, Namaz-e-Sham, Namaz-e-Digar and Namaz Khuptan. In fact, Guru Nanakdev's bold assertion that 'Na koi Hindu, na Musalman' did not remain only a matter of statement for him; he verily practiced what he believed. His intimate relationship with Mardana, a Musalman by birth and one among the *panj pyaras* and a constant companion, on the one hand and verses included in the *Guru Granth Sahib* on the other doubtlessly prove that contrary to the publicity done by some that Sikhism was brought into existence to combat Islam, the Hindu-Muslim amity was one of his greatest achievements. Inversely, the propaganda may contain some truth in the sense that like his predecessor Kabir, he also was one to do away with

the unnatural barrier between adherents of different institutional religions.

Besides such elements of crucial historical and social importance of the text, the *Adi Granth* is perhaps more fascinating as sheer poetry. Their pantheism is mind-boggling, while the language is seductively simple. In the phenomenal nature he sees the presence of the Lord:

The sky is the salver; the sun and the moon are the lamps,
The spheres of stars are studded in it as jewels;
The chandan-scented winds from the Malay mountain wave
And scatter across the fragrance of myriad flowers.
Thus is thy worship performed,
O Thou Destroyer of fear!

The second movement reminds us of the hymnal chores of the Vedic seers, or do these lines remind us of Arjuna's ovation on beholding the Visvarupa?:

Thousands are Thy eyes, yet hast Thou eyes?
Thousands are Thy forms, yet hast Thou a form?
Thousands are thy lotus-feet, yet hast Thou feet?
Thousands thy noses to smell, yet hast thou a nose,
O wonder of wonders!
Yet the vision does not terrorize him. He seeks:
Grant Nanak, the Chatrik, the nectar of Thy mercy,
Lord,
That he mergeth in Thy name. [Dhanasri, M 1]

In another verse, asked by the Qazi who is a true Muslim, Guru Nanakdev replies – and what else could be a better description not only of a Musalman but a Man, may be only the material and the physical properties might change :

If compassion be thy mosque, faith thy prayer-mat,
and honest living thy *Quran*,
And modesty thy circumcision, contentment thy
fast, then, verily, thou art a true Muslim.
Let good deeds be thy Kaaba, and Truth thy
Prophet, and let thy prayer be for God's Grace.
And thy rosary be of His Will, then, God will keep
thy honour. [Var of Majh, M 1]

In selecting verses from his precursors and contemporaries, apart from the similarities of temperament, the poet in Guru Nanakdev must have had worked silently. Kabir's modesty perhaps found resonance in his *Saram* :

Kabir: I am the worst of men: / Except myself
everyone is good!
He who humbly thinketh this of himself / Know
him, O Kabir, to be my friend. [Sl. 7]
Or Baba Farid's Sloka:
Farid, why wandreth thou, / From jungle to jungle,
/ Breaking the thorny branches,
In search of thy lord? / In thy heart and not in the
jungle / Thy Lord doth reside. [Sl.19]

In Mardana's hymn, the awareness of engulfing evils could have been deadening for him and rudely shocking for the readers or the audience. But the hold of the name redeems him :

In the vat of the body / Egoism is the wine,
Desire and low cravings / Are its companions.
The cup of ambition is / Abrim with falsehood.
And the God of death / Is the cup bearer;

By drinking this wine O Nanak, / One gathers multiple
sins.

Make knowledge your yeast, / The praise of God
 the bread you eat
 And the fear of God your meat. / This, O Nanak, is
 the true spiritual food.
 Make divine Name your sustenance. [Var, Bihagra]

Religious experience and literary expression seldom obtains equilibrium. Religion and its concomitant pressure of faith often overwhelm literary sensibility. What may be an unfathomably deep realization in the spiritual realm, may not be adequately conveyed in terms of literary parameters. In medieval Indian literature, the two were successfully married in the works of quite a few seer-poets so much so that it turns out to be difficult to make out whether they were poets first and then religious souls or the vice versa. In spite of the limitations of pre-modern modes of circulation of texts, it is astonishing how Guru Nanakdev collected poems from diverse parts of the country; or could be that the wandering minstrels had made them current through oral dissemination. But one wonder still remains. Unless he himself had been a connoisseur of poetic art, he would not have picked such select gems from the repository of medieval religious literature of the country and the tradition he thus created continues even today. This continuity despite interruptions, most certainly is the hallmark of Indian culture. Among others, Guru Nanakdev and the nine other Gurus following him are the architects of that cultural edifice.

TIME, MYTH, APORIA AND SPACE : NARRATIVE PARADIGMS AND THE FICTIONAL TEXT

KRISHNA SEN

The Narrative Paradigm and Representation

Musing on the nature of narrative, science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin imagines the contemporary story-teller as the archetypal Scheherazade who has somehow strayed into post-modernity and invented a quasi-Red Riding Hood fable "about a great-aunt who went to a symposium on narrative and got eaten in the forest by a metabear." Attempting to fashion a tale about the great-aunt and the metabear according to the time-honoured Aristotelian format of beginning, middle (which soon turns into a "muddle") and end, she is brought up short as she spies, 'sitting' right there across

the campfire, "Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*" (a reference to Borges' metafictional story on story-writing), and wonders guiltily, "What would Alain Robbe-Grillet say?" about an Aristotelian linear logical story. This leads our self-reflexive postmodern Scheherazade to ponder on the significance of narratives, and then to question the very act of story-telling:

*The histoire is the what
And the discours is the how
But what I want to know [...]
Is le pourquoi.
Why are we sitting here around the campfire?*

In other words, what is the use of stories, or why do we create and respond to them? Le Guin's essay ends with the re-telling of a Native American folktale on the universal theme of crime and punishment, and the speculation that stories are meaningful, not as aesthetic constructs, but as part of the magical mnemonic storehouse of humanity through which human beings articulate eternal values – "[...] insofar as I have remembered it [the folktale], it is mine; and now, if you like it, it's yours. In the tale, in the telling, we are all one" (Le Guin 187-9, 195).

Responding to Le Guin's metanarrative on narrative, Paul Hernadi observes – "The 'how' of different readings and their 'what' cannot fail to differ, for they reflect different responses to the more basic question, 'why?'" (Hernadi 198). The view shared by most narratologists who have addressed this crucial 'why?' is that stories are, at a fundamental level, epistemological – they are about ways of negotiating with what Michel de Certeau calls 'the practice of everyday life.' Even structuralist narratology that privileges the formal over the

epistemological does not entirely eschew the meaning-making dimension of stories. Gerard Genette's basic structuralist premise in his *Narrative Discourse* is that "the function of narrative is not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition etc., but simply to tell a story and therefore to 'report' facts (real or fictive) [...]" (Genette 161); nevertheless, he then goes on to invoke the categories of mood (Genette 161ff) and 'polymodality' (Genette 198ff) to clear a space for telling "according to one point of view or another ; [...] one or another perspective" (Genette 161-2; emphases in the original). In *The Postmodern Condition* the post-structuralist Lyotard defines stories as modalities of "world-making" or "worlding" - "the popular stories [...] allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence, and on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it" (Lyotard 19-20). In other words, the actions of the protagonists, the rewards and punishments meted out to them, and the incidents that occur or do not occur, all signal and legitimize the world-views of the societies that frame those stories. Further, to use John Muthyala's useful term, stories can be instruments of "reworlding" as well as of "worlding" (Muthyala 91). We may say that since every re-citing is inevitably also a re-siting, the re-told text takes on the grain and colour of its altered context. This is one of the senses in which a story can belong to everybody - 'text' is, after all, etymologically related not only to 'texture' (the inner or autotelic weave of the narrative) but also to 'context' (the outer location in which it is enfolded, embedded, 'weaved in'; L. *contextus*: connection). This is how *Jane Eyre* metamorphoses into *Wide Sargasso Sea* or *Robinson Crusoe* into *Foe*, and it is the basis of postcolonial appropriations of *The Tempest*.

In "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of

Reality," Hayden White has explored variations in the representation of historical events in terms of determiners imposed by the intellectual and cultural norms of an age. Referring to the tension between the two etymological provenances of 'to narrate' (L. *narrare*), that is, 'knowing' (L. *gnarus*) and 'telling' (L. *narro*), White highlights "[...] the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning [...]" (White 1). To put this in another way, what an age demands from its narratives determines their content and form. It may be contended then (though New Critics and structuralists would demur) that narrative paradigms are forms of representation that are mediated by the epistemological dynamics of their narrational contexts. This essay looks at four narrative paradigms from this perspective – time, myth, aporia and space.

Time

Western culture even before the advent of Christianity had by and large prioritised a teleological worldview and a belief in the ameliorative properties of linear movement towards a desirable end – this is evident in the Aristotelian tragic plot moving towards its catharsis, in the Christian Everyman's redemptive journey from damnation to salvation, and in the secular capitalist celebration of (material) progress during the Enlightenment. Taking the novel as the form through which to illustrate shifting narrative paradigms, we see that linear or temporal organization is a major marker of the first or classic realist phase of Western fiction during the Enlightenment. At that time the novel was viewed as the obverse of the romance – John Preston shows how these "anti-romances are full of a sense of what they are *not*" (Preston 331). So in his novel *Incognita*, Congreve debunks "the miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances" of romance

as "all a lye": he then goes on to describe the novel as being "of a more familiar nature," containing "Intrigues in practice, [...] Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, novels more Delight" (Congreve, "Preface to the Reader"). In *Pamela* Richardson, too, derides the "poetical tribe" of "Romancers" whose works are "calculated to fire the imagination rather than inform the judgment" –he then demands rhetorically, "what is the instruction that can be gathered from such pieces for the conduct of common life?" (Richardson, *Pamela* II, Letter CII). As these contemporary critiques demonstrate, it was usual to contrast the idealized events of the romance with the apodictic incidents of the novel. However, an equally pertinent contrast surely is that between the idealized time of the romance (an undifferentiated continuum, a 'once upon a time') and the empirical time of the novel (a 'here and now' with its concatenation of cause and effect). Plot time as a reflector of historical time was no less important than social verisimilitude in establishing the 'reality' of these early English novels. It was also influential in shaping the common perception (valid till today) of what a novel is – it is a prose narrative that tells a recognizable story unfolding in time.

Indeed, the dimension of time – not the ideal time of romance or the Scaligerian 'unity of time,' but the flow of past, present and future in which events 'happen' as a consequence of other events – is fundamental to the Western imagining of the fictional text. Even ahistorical structuralist narratology accommodates time functions. Todorov speaks of "duration-time as opposed to event-time" (Todorov 28), while Genette follows Todorov in defining narrative "tense" as "the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the discourse"

(Genette 29). Later proponents of narrative as specifically a form of temporality are careful to distinguish temporality from mere succession. Gerald Prince emphasizes the role of the "meaningful" in his definition of "narrativity" – narratives are "oriented temporal wholes [...] consisting of discrete, specific and positive situations and events, and meaningful in terms of a human(ized) project and world" (Prince 64). In his "Narrative Time" Ricoeur rejects structuralist "de-chronologization" (Ricoeur 180), and constructs a three-tier template of time in narratives – "within-time-ness" which is "a linear series of 'nows'", "historicality" which is multi-dimensional in accommodating memory and the past, and finally "deep temporality" which "elicits a configuration from a succession" (Ricoeur 166, 167, 174). Though Ricoeur avers that "the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events" (174) because of the meaning-making function of its configurative "plot" (which is contrasted with the merely sequential "story"), he nevertheless insists that "what occurs happens 'in' time" (Ricoeur 168), and that even memory corresponds to "an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end" (Ricoeur 179). In *The Sense of an Ending* Frank Kermode, too, distinguishes between "simple chronicity" and "this play of consciousness over history, this plot-making" (Kermode 46, 57). Finally, if we turn to the Bakhtinian chronotope (chronos + topos), which is a more radical narrative paradigm accommodating "charged and responsive" space (as a Marxist, Bakhtin would naturally emphasize the specificity of social space), we nevertheless see that "the primary category in the chronotope is time" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* [DI] 84, 85).

What is interesting is the relation between temporality and fictional "worlding." In *Art and Answerability*,

Bakhtin had held that the "adventure time" chronotope (of which the romance is an example) is "almost completely free of anything that has objective or meaning-related validity – it is a *playing* with life as a 'fabular' value, freed of any answerability within the unitary and unique event of being" (Bakhtin, *Art* 158; emphasis in the original). Expectedly, this fabular world operates in ahistorical time – "These hours and days leave no trace [...]" (*DI* 94). However, Bakhtin's second literary chronotope, the "adventure time of everyday life" (of which the novel is an example), is concerned with "the idea of the development [of an individual] - but one that unfolds, not so much in a straight line as spasmodically, a line with 'knots' in it, therefore, that constitutes a distinctive type of temporal sequence. [...]" Space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial" (*DI* 113, 120). These 'knots' are the turns of the plot. Taking Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* as the prototype of the novelistic chronotope, Bakhtin states that this kind of plot is "defined by the sequence of guilt à retribution à redemption à blessedness" (*DI* 121). Thus while the "adventure time" chronotope has little "meaning-related validity" as far as the competences of everyday life are concerned, the "adventure time of everyday life" chronotope is value-laden as regards the desired trajectory of everyday life.

Catherine Belsey has analysed the meaning-making function of the classic realist linear plot (which mirrors historical time) as follows:

Classic realism is characterized by *illusionism*, narrative which leads to *closure*, and a *hierarchy of discourses* which establish the 'truth' of the story. [...] [It] turns on the creation of enigma through the precipitation of disorder which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying

systems. [...] But the movement of classic realist narrative towards closure ensures the reinstatement of order, sometimes a new order, sometimes the old restored, but always intelligible because familiar. Decisive choices are made, identity is established, the murderer is exposed, or marriage generates a new set of subject-positions. [...] Harmony has been re-established through the redistribution of the signifiers into a new system of differences which closes off the threat to subjectivity, and it remains only to make this harmonious and coherent world intelligible to the reader, closing off in the process the sense of danger to the reader's subjectivity. (Belsey 70, 75-76; emphases in the original)

The forward movement in time over hurdles and "knots" towards the closure not only allays the protagonist's, but also the reader's, sense of social and cultural dislocation in a given situation. Hence, "classic realism clearly conforms to the modality Benveniste calls *declarative*, imparting 'knowledge' to a reader whose position is thereby stabilized [...]" (Belsey 91; emphasis in the original). The concluding paragraph of Austen's *Emma*, for instance, is a perfect example of the restoration of correct moral values and the rejection of false mores in a world temporarily disturbed by social pretension and lack of empathy:

The wedding [of Emma and M. Knightley] was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery and parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby and very inferior to her own. [...] But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the

ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. (Austen 1060)

Paradoxically, the seeds of disintegration of the tightly knit classic realist plot lay within this very neatness. Kermode has noted how "medieval randomness is countered by the logic of Aristotelian plot" (Kermode 165). It is this same linear logic that Flaubert, for instance, castigated as unnatural and artificial since the actual experience of reality is not sequential but simultaneous. Therefore, "everything should sound simultaneously; one should hear the bellowing of the cattle, the whisperings of the lovers and the rhetoric of the officials all at the same time" (qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 685). In his "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945) Joseph Frank has glossed Flaubert's experiments with the classic realist mode in *Madame Bovary* by pointing to his innovative handling of time :

[...] since language proceeds in time, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence. And this is exactly what Flaubert does: he dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action [...]. (qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 685)

According to Wimsatt and Brooks, "This device of incongruous juxtaposition became the 'Time-shift' developed by Conrad and [Ford Madox] Ford" (ibid). However, these two critics miss the mark when they continue - "Joyce, of course, exploited the device to the limit in his *Ulysses*" (ibid). Joyce (and in many instances Conrad as well) did something very different. While *Madame Bovary* does not ultimately deviate from the inexorable telos of the classic realist reinstatement of

order, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* dispense altogether with classic realism and its temporal and teleological plot.

Myth

The Modernists were confronted with a far more complex and contradictory world than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the artist's task, it was felt, was no longer to represent an accessible and homogeneous world 'out there' but to fashion a new whole out of many disparate and confusing components. Apollinaire wrote of his first ride in an automobile on "August 31, 1914," so memorable that it is the opening line of his poem "La Petite Auto" ("The Little Car") – "We said farewell to a whole era" (Apollinaire 105). Virginia Woolf says in "A Letter to a Young Poet" – "[...] let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, until one thing melts in another, until the taxis are dancing with the daffodils, until a whole has been made from all these separate fragments" (Woolf, "Letter" 189; the dancing daffodils appear to refer to the simpler world of Wordsworth, sans technology and its attendant complications). In "The Novel of Consciousness" (reprinted in 1919 as "Modern Fiction") Woolf resoundingly rejects classic realism by shifting the definition of 'reality' away from the empirical:

[...] the enormous labour of providing the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced [...]; if a writer were a free man and not a slave [...] there would be no plot, no tragedy, no comedy, no love interest [...]. Life is not a series of giglamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and

uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (Woolf, "Novel" 123)

Temporality likewise suffers the fate of empirical reality – linear historical time, regarded earlier as the matrix of human experience, now becomes redundant:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of important comes not here but there [...] (ibid)

An apt example of this kind of time is the section entitled "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*. Time is here totally fluid, moving not just in lateral time-shifts as in Flaubert, but freely along a multiplicity of experiential axes – horizontally along the entire parabola of mental activity (memory, fantasy, association, speculation, intuition, dream and so on) and vertically into the depths of the self.

Like Woolf, Italo Calvino, too, repudiates the kind of literature that works "toward the consecration of values, toward the confirmation of established authority," through the "combinatorial analysis" of plot (Calvino 80, 78). For Calvino the sequential triviality of story is redeemed, not through plot, but through myth. For the Modernists, myth was no fabular Bakhtinian "adventure time" or Aboriginal dream-time or even Mircea Eliade's "ab origine, in illo tempore [...]" the sacred time [of myth

and ritual]" (Eliade 52), but the meaningful substratum or subtext of contingent human experience. Calvino says – "Literature reaches forth from the extreme edge of the effable. [...] Myth is that hidden part of every story, the underground part, the zone still unexplored because there are still no words to take us there" (Calvino 77). The impact of psychoanalysis is clearly discernible when Calvino claims that myth alone can plumb "the unconscious [which] is an ocean of the ineffable [...]" (ibid). Thomas Mann, again, is willing to sacrifice the individualism and specificity of classic realism for a fuller and more transcendent reality marked by the archetypal rather than the personal:

Actually, if his [man's] existence consisted merely in the unique and the present [...] he would be [...] unstable in his own self-regard [...]. His dignity and security lies all unconsciously in the fact that with him something timeless has once more emerged into the light and become present; it is a mythic value added to the otherwise poor and valueless single character [...]. (Mann 676)

In addition to irradiating and enhancing the content of narrative, myth functions also as a structuring or formal principle – it is both "the foundation of life" and "the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious" (Mann 675).

It was left to T.S. Eliot to articulate the precise way in which myth structures a narrative. In his review of *Ulysses* ("*Ulysses, Order and Myth*"), Eliot writes of Joyce's radical technique of "using the myth, [...] manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity":

It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [...] It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology [...], ethnology and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, [...] order and form [...]. (Eliot 681)

A brief example of the mythical method is, for example, Shaun/Yawn's reverie in the fifteenth section of *Finnegan's Wake* when he ponders his "soul's groupography" (476) – "Hep! I can see him in the fishnoo! [...] Manu ware!" (525). In diving into the depths of his psyche to search out his own identity, Shaun discover his father HCE, and realizes that he reprises HCE as the later Manus of Indian mythology replicated the archetypal Manu. In this complicated dreamwork, HCE has been "metandmorefussed" (513) into a Vishnu-figure – "Fishnoo" is Vishnu in his incarnation as *matsya avatar*, when he rescued the archetypal Manu from the Primal Flood. Through a phonetical sleight of hand Joyce collapses the "finny" Fishnoo/Vishnu with the Irish legendary hero Finn MacCool to signal the universality of the *Wake's* Irish protagonist, HCE.

Like Calvino and Mann, Eliot views historical time as random and disorderly and mythic time as ordered and whole, and feels that human life gains in significance by being patterned in terms of myth. The structuring principle is analogy rather than parallelism. The modern experience, which may be delineated in all its specificity if desired (one thinks of the raw verisimilitude of many

episodes in *Ulysses*), is not the same as the occurrences in the corresponding myth, but significantly similar, enabling certain thematic conclusions to be drawn as regards the subliminal configurations of the human psyche. Fittingly, in an age whose intellectual parameters were defined in major ways by Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Jung and Frazer, the 'knowledge' conveyed to the reader in terms of the mythical method relates, not to the practice of everyday life, but to the deepest recesses of the reader's own being.

Aporia

The Left-leaning generation of the thirties and forties excoriated European High Modernism for what it felt to be its dilettantish world-weariness, its elitist aestheticism, its self-conscious introversion, and its refusal to engage fully with the traumatic events of the early twentieth century. The fulcrum of all these charges with respect to literature was the non-empirical and ahistorical mythical method (a good example of such critique is George Orwell's essay, "Inside the Whale"). But if the Thirties writers debunked the High Modernists for their apocalyptic attitude and penchant for deliberate abstruseness and linguistic mystification, it is the postmodernists and post-structuralists who sought totally to undermine the Modernist project per se. High Modernist erudition and seriousness, its author-centric stance, its rage for order as manifested in attempts to shape and control the randomness of history through the architectonics of myth - all these accorded ill with post-structuralist theories of the death of the author, self-reflexive textuality, accommodation of popular culture, deferred meaning and the playful sign, as well as with postmodern concepts such as Baudrillard's media-mediated notion of reality as "simulacrum" or "hyperreality" (Baudrillard 138) and Lyotard's scepticism

about "grand narratives" (Lyotard . Barthes in his post-structuralist phase categorizes all previous representational paradigms (including the Modernist) as semiological or meaning-making, while postmodern textuality is termed "semioclastic" or meaning-breaking (qtd. in Harari 30). Indeed, from Derrida's attack on logocentrism in favour of deconstructive *différance* in *Of Grammatology*, to Deleuze and Guattari's privileging of "disjunctive synthesis" and the schizophrenic text (Deleuze and Guattari 9ff), the episteme of the postmodern narrative appears to be aporia rather than formal cohesion of any sort.

As opposed to the Modernist belief in the possibility of constructing alternative paradigms of order more truly reflective of 'inner' reality than the empirical and teleological classic realist model, post-structuralist theory posits the total impossibility of coherent form. On this reading, even the so-called formal unity of eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction is only apparent, since closer analysis can reveal several contradictions at the very heart of this unity. Though there are significant differences between the major post-structuralist theorists, the impossibility of homogeneity and coherence in the fictional text is a common refrain. Deconstruction contends that in every text, there are inevitably points of equivocation and 'undecidability' that betray the author's attempt to impose a stable meaning on experience. This is because the process of writing always reveals that which has been suppressed, and so Derrida considers aporia (or an impassable chasm in meaning) to be intrinsic to the written word. In "Signature Event Context" he explains – "[...] a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription [...]. This force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other

elements of the internal contextual chain [...]” (Derrida 316). Similarly, Pierre Macherey locates the meaning of a text in its gaps and fissures rather than in its organized verbal formations. In his *A Theory of Literary Production* Macherey rejects both the classic realist mode (“To know is not to listen to some pre-existing word”) and the mythical mode (“To know, therefore, is not to rediscover or reconstitute a latent sense: hidden or forgotten”) (Macherey 14), and says:

To explain the work is, instead of seeking a hidden centre which would give it life (the interpretative illusion is organicist and vitalist), to see it in its effective decentredness: it is to reject the principle or an intrinsic analysis (or an immanent criticism) which would artificially shut the work on itself, and, from the fact that it is complete, deduce the image of a “totality.” [...] The structure of the work which allows it to be understood is this internal displacement (*décalage*), or this *caesura*, by means of which it corresponds to reality, itself also incomplete, which it reveals without reflecting it. The literary work registers a difference, reveals a determinate absence: this is what it says if it is obliged to say anything at all. Thus what must be seen in the work is what it lacks, a lack (*défaut*) without which it would not exist, without which it would have nothing to say, neither the means to say something nor not say something. (Macherey 96-7)

The reason that no text is a smooth self-sufficient totality is because “At the edge of the text, one always ends up finding, momentarily hidden, but eloquent because of its very absence, *the language of ideology*” (Macherey 75; emphasis in the original). The literary work, which is

embedded not in a variety of social contexts but in a variety of discursive contexts, is a "production," not in the strictly structuralist sense but as an "organisation of a multiplicity" (Macherey 54), and the lack at its centre is the unconsciousness about its own constitutive ideology - "[...] in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said*" (Macherey 95; emphasis in the original). Bakhtin, too, invokes ideology to deduce the impossibility of formal coherence. In *The Dialogic Imagination* he contrasts the aristocratic and monologic world-view of the epic with the democratic and dialogic world-view of the novel. The novel (sometimes unconsciously) always transgresses normative boundaries and subverts claims for the absolute authority of any one point of view. This it does by mixing high style with low (*DI* 58) and the literary with the non-literary (*DI* 33), so that instead of "a single unitary language," it offers "a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" (*DI* 47; emphasis in the original). Because of this interpellation by a plethora of discourses, the novel is "multi-generic, multi-styled, [...] reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture." Thus ultimately "the dominant discourse is reflected as something ageing, dying [...]" (*DI* 60).

Eric Woehrling has shown in "Is the Novel Original? Derrida and (Post-) Modernity" how the postmodern concept of 'reality' is conditioned by altered notions of time and space. He traces the "denial of the difference between fiction and reality (as in Baudrillard)" to "a privileging of interpretative surface over truthful depth" and an awareness of "the inherent contradiction in the concept of time as a series of presents" which are "always already in the past" even as one experiences those moments, thus making for a disjointed plane rather than a smooth linear flow or a meandering stream of

consciousness looping back and forth in time. In *Simulations*, Baudrillard explains what happens to the artistic sign under the pressure of these cognitive changes:

This would be the successive phases of the image:

- it is the reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality
- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever, it is its own pure simulacrum. (Baudrillard 11; emphasis in the original)

The first mode portrays recognizable experiences; the second is a maleficent feigning of reality, "in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own"; the third occurs "when the real is no longer what it used to be," and marks the order of "nostalgia," with "a proliferation of myths of origin" and "a resurrection of the figurative"; and the fourth mode, "is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation" (Baudrillard 12). The first two modes represent classic realism and its obverse, the gothic or the grotesque; the third gestures towards the mythical method; and the fourth indicates the fractured sign and the aporetic text.

Two postmodern novelists, Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federer, have characterized the aporetic text as "unwriting" and "surfiction" respectively. The artist's responsibility now is not to tell stories or create illusions of coherence or depth, but to mirror the fragmented postmodern experience in terms of the narrative form itself, and not just through its content. This kind of text shatters illusionism by exposing its own artifice, instead of creating structured aesthetic wholes. So Federman says that surfiction seeks "to unmask its own fictionality, [...] and not pretend any longer to pass for reality." Sukenick explains the techniques of self-reflexive textuality that surfiction or unwriting employs as

opposed to classic realist empiricism and Modernist depth psychology – “If art is not a reflection of reality, then the last reflection to be got rid of is self-reflection. [...] The way out of the dilemma of Narcissus lies in the work of art as artifice [...] self-reflexive, not self-reflective. It is not an imitation but a new thing in its own right, an invention” (Sukenick 98-99). As an example of such a self-deconstructive text that completely unravels what Derrida calls the myth of presence, one might cite a complete short story by the Russian writer Daniil Kharmis:

The Red-Haired Man

There was once a red-haired man who had no eyes and no ears. He also had no hair, so he was called red-haired only in a manner of speaking. He wasn't able to talk because he didn't have a mouth. He had no nose either. He didn't have any arms or legs. He also didn't have a stomach and he didn't have a back, and he also didn't have any other insides. He didn't have anything. So it's hard to understand whom we are talking about. So we'd better not talk about him any more.

Space

Space as a narrative paradigm is neither the minor partner in the Bakhtinian chronotope nor the outer space of science fiction, but the entire discursive terrain of human action and experience. Fredric Jameson's has spoken of “a certain spatial turn” (Jameson 154) that, according to him, distinguishes particular forms of Postmodernism. Postcolonialism is notable in its theoretical use of ideological space in its core discourse of centres and margins, and in its more recent counterdiscourse about transnationalism and borderlands. Cultural materialism, too, concerns itself

with space, though differently from postcolonialism – it primarily focuses the space of the community, with its stratifications, hierarchies, and differentiated art forms and modes of expression. The most holistic use of space, however, can be attributed to poststructuralist geography – it not only dissolves the place/space binary, but is able to include within its theoretical taxonomy the apparently discrepant elements of historical process, cultural formation, and nature, by means of which the specificity of place is transformed into the multivalence of space.

The point of departure for post-structuralist geography is the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) in which he contends that there are no unmarked landscapes - all spaces, natural as well as human, are socially produced. Challenging "the illusion of a transparent, 'pure' and neutral space" (Lefebvre 292), Lefebvre distinguishes between space as neatly organized "surface" or Euclidean space, and space as "volume" or "full space," "full in nature and in history" (Lefebvre 313). It is these full spaces or *topoi* that yield "multiple trajectories" (Lefebvre 295) for entry and interpretation

Edward Soja identifies Lefebvre's *topoi* with what Foucault termed "heterotopias, [which] represent 'the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us.' To get to these 'other' spaces requires a different way of seeing [...]" (Soja, "Heterotopologies" 15). Post-structuralist space, then, is a palimpsest of differentiated human and natural activity invested with a multiplicity of sites and subtexts and circuits that both militate against the monologic, and simultaneously exist in a state of tension with each other. For if, as Robert Balm puts it, it is possible to delineate "region" in terms of the new geography as "imagination, memory, hope and desire"

(Balm 112), it is also true that the percolation of historical processes and cultural formations is not only always filtered through grids of power, but cannot also be limited to a given landscape as it invariably spills over borders and permeates other landscapes.

One of the crucial differences between Euclidean or static space and post-structuralist or dynamic space is the latter's appropriation of the dimension of time and the idea of history. Lefebvre had claimed that "Space is becoming the principal stake of goal-directed actions and struggles. [...] The result is a vast movement in terms of which space can no longer be looked upon as an 'essence'" (Lefebvre 410). Soja glosses this observation as follows – "Space, 'this most general of products,' thus accrues to itself all that has been formerly and familiarly attached to the social production of time as history or social historicity" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 45). From this perspective, space is sedimented with the entire gamut of human experience, and is once again a meaning-making paradigm – the obverse of digitized hyperreal metropolitan aporia.

Indeed, spatiality as a narrative paradigm in Lefebvre's and Soja's sense of the term is more characteristic of the non-metropolitan fictional text in which the marginal or peripheral consciousness seeks to recuperate the fullness of its selfhood by laying claim to a landscape which is a cultural space rather than a physical place. One thinks of David Malouf's *Australia*, Rudolfo Anaya's *New Mexico*. Gloria Anzaldua's Texas-Mexico border or the tide country of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. In diasporic literature spaces such as the imaginary homeland and the new site of cultural re-birth are signifiers of multiple identities within a single self. These spaces are not, like Hardy's Wessex or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, metonyms for certain social formations (post-industrial Britain or the racialised

American South), but sites of memory, history and identity formation. As an instance of a non-metropolitan space within a metropolitan context, one can take Graham Swift's 1983 novel *Waterland* (shortlisted for the Booker Prize and winner of three other prestigious awards). *Waterland* is a bildungsroman set in Britain's 'tide country,' the forbidding and marshy Cambridgeshire fens of East Anglia's "the Wash," once Viking territory. Swift's dour landscape of swamps and swelling waters integrates nature, history, legend, superstition, realism and science to evoke a totally different Britain from the busy and solidly socialized world of the eighteenth and nineteenth century English novel – "For the chief fact about the Fens is that they are reclaimed land [...] which, even today, is not quite solid. [...] And what are the Fens [...] but a landscape [...] which most approximates to Nothing?" (Swift 8, 13). Like Ghosh's *Sunderbans* and Anzaldúa's *borderlands*, Swift's Fens are simultaneously a physical and a psychic site that offers a counterdiscursive perspective on the processes of identity formation.

Afterword

Since narrative paradigms are epistemic constructs, they will continue to evolve and change. The graphic novel uses visual as well as literary tropes, while the interactive text in cyberspace uses hyperlinks. Nevertheless, they are all ultimately forms of story-telling – cognitive, and sometimes even redemptive. As Graham Swift asks of the "reality" of the Fens, the unredeemed flatness, the mud and water and treacherous tides of that "nothing-landscape" – "How did the Cricks survive reality? By telling stories" (Swift 17).

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LOCATIONS OF READING AND V. S. NAIPAUL'S READERS

JHARNA SANYAL

It is only through readjustments of his own projections that the reader can experience something previously not within his experience, and this something,...ranges from a detached objectification of what he is entangled in, to an experience of himself that would otherwise be precluded by his entanglement in the pragmatic world around him...The imbalance between text and reader, however, is undefined, and it is this very indeterminacy that increases the variety of communication possible.

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I

The 'lowing herd winding o'er the lea'¹ did not pose much problem to the generations of Indian students

nurtured on the 'universal' sentiments of Gray's 'Elegy'. The herd was a part of the pastoral for both the British policy makers as well as for the Indian students. It would not be redundant to mention that for the Bengali child of yore brought up on the lines: '*rakhal gorur pal loye jaye mathelsishugon dei mon nijo nijo pathe*² (the cowherd takes the cows to graze/and children settle down to studies)'the 'herd' going out to graze, or returning home at dusk (*godhuli*)³ was a recognizable phenomenon. What could happen in another location where there were 'no herds like that', and naturally enough, the child has no picture 'in mind' to visualize the line? In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul recounts that the picture he had in mind was that of those on the condensed milk tins as they had no herd like that on their island. In this situation the 'lowing herd' of Gray being reconstituted by the supplementary picture in the condensed milk tin becomes much more meaningful not only through the contending aesthetics of representation but ontologically and epistemologically as well.

When in his 1835 *Minute on Education* Macaulay insisted on replacing the indigenous systems of education in India by the British one he had politically envisioned the role the English system could most effectively play in the Imperial scheme of relationships between the ruler and the ruled. Gouri Visvanathan has demonstrated the way literary education and texts were employed to construct and nurture colonial subjectivity. Macaulay's arguments in favour rested on the superiority of English literature and the 'use'-value of the language:

[w]hoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language

is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together (Allen and Tribedi 199).

English, in the colonial set up, of course had its historical, political and pragmatic relevance and necessity. However, in India the Anglicist system could not completely erase the Oriental systems; the best brains culled their intellectual sustenance from both the traditions.

In a location like the Caribbean islands, with its economic, cultural and intellectual environment, English education had succeeded in becoming an effective mechanism to 'form' the native subjects right from the schoolroom.⁴ In their eagerness to be re-formed by the education that could lead them to a promising prospect, to a different life, childhood was pawned to acquire the tantalizing gift of English education. In almost all his novels the bruised memories of this culture of education are reiterated to inscribe a dominant moment in the life of the captive readers. In the classic autobiographical/allegorical 'House' text⁵ Naipaul captures the situation very succinctly:

The widows were now almost frantic to have their children educated. There was no longer a Hanuman House to protect them; everyone had to fight for himself in a new world, the world Owad and Shekhar had entered, where *education was the only protection...*

...And all the evening...there were sounds of flogging...and Basdei cried, '*Read! Learn! Learn! Read!*' (*A House for Mr. Biswas*, 436-7; emphasis mine)

Like George Lamming, Merle Hodge, Erna Brodber and many other Caribbean writers, Naipaul too writes about the ways education had been fetishized. In *A Way*

in the World Naipaul recounts a meeting with a famous, black, self-made lawyer, his friend's father, who tells him, 'My father worshipped education. It was his way of giving me ambition. He was not an educated man (15)'. The lawyer carried the burden of the classics: his name Evander came from Virgil (though he knew it was from Homer). In the periphery of metropolitan culture the English books, - big, big books' measuring 'six to seven inches altogether which one is proud to possess (Naipaul, 1957,5)'- acquired a material character.

The 'use' value of English language and literature in a 'new world' as Naipaul represents it was not in its enabling the recipient to readily access all the vast intellectual wealth (as Macaulay had assumed) but in disabling him intellectually with the knowledge of his imaginative inaccessibility to the world represented in books. The reader's interaction with the text was more destructive than creative. Literally, there could be no better example of this phenomenon than Naipaul's 'B Wordsworth' in *Miguel Street*.

Remembering his early readings, Naipaul wrote,

[v]ery soon I got to know that there was a further world outside, of which our colonial world was only a shadow...

The books themselves I couldn't enter on my own. I didn't have the imaginative key. Such social knowledge as I had - a faint remembered village India and a mixed colonial world seen from the outside - didn't help with the literature of the metropolis. I was two worlds away' [2000, 16].

So, Willy Somerset Chandran's outburst is a reiteration of the same gnawing sense of repression, helplessness and inadequacy that has to be accommodated as a part of being:

I didn't understand *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I couldn't understand the people or the story and didn't know what period the book was set in. Shakespeare was better, but I didn't know what to make of Shelley and Keats and Wordsworth. When I read those poets I wanted to say, 'But this is just a pack of lies. No one feels like that.'...I was in a great mess, feeling that we were all living in a false security, feeling idle, hating my studies, and knowing that great things were happening outside. (2001, 8)

II

A House for Mr. Biswas is accepted as Naipaul's classic work on the postcolonial situation. It demonstrates the effects of 'epistemic violence (Spivak, 76)' and the formation of the colonial subject. It is a book about books: a book about books as things, as pieces of furniture, books as protecting and providing agents, as estranging agents as well; of books as sign and as signified, as signs emptied of significance. Books are both metonymy and metaphor, feeding like cankers on the life of the reader impoverished and possessed. Books are a tantalizing invitation to a feast in a house with locked doors.

Who is the reader in Naipaul's text? Mr Mohun Biswas, his son Anand or are the father and the son evolutionary stages in the process of reading through which a community 'comes of age'? The *buildungsroman* teleology implied in the phrase 'coming-of-age' smacks of a familiar paradigm in colonial discourse in which the perceived infantile stage of the colonial subjects provides a political excuse for their domination. Or, is Naipaul making up fictional readers to *textify* his own process of reading and writing?

'A novel,' Naipaul believes, 'was something made up; that was almost its definition. At the same time it was expected to be true, to be drawn from life; so that part of the point of a novel came from half rejecting the fiction, or looking through it to reality (2000,22).' To the Trinidad Indians, the successors of the indented labourers, - a community, as Naipaul tells us, without a mythology of its own - the books of the metropolis were both a fiction and reality. In Lal's Canadian Mission school young Mohun Biswas was '*Learning to say*' and '*learning by heart*' (my emphasis) things 'he never seriously believed', the history he learned was as unreal as the geography.' (46) Naipul writes about this estranging effect of colonial education:

...at Mr. Worm's exhibition class, cramming hard all the way, *learning everything by heart*, living with abstractions, having a grasp of very little, was like entering a cinema sometime after the film had started and getting only scattered pointers to the story...*I never ceased to feel a stranger...I had no proper understanding of where I was, and really never had the time to find out: all spent in a blind, driven kind of colonial study*' (2000;14,16. emphasis mine)

Colonial study in a location like the Trinidad, with no indigenous literary tradition to sustain, contain and negotiate the chaos and flux of history, the books from the metropolis arrived as prefabricated structures ready to intern the imaginative life of indentured, migrant people on the periphery of metropolitan cultures. The English language itself was a sign of wonder that could only be repeated in fragments, in approximate accents; 'buth certificates' functioned as satisfactorily as 'birth certificates' authenticating the official entry of 'only a labourer's son' in the Canadian Mission school with the incantation of 'ought oughts are ought.' By performing

the language, Biswas, living off the charity of his aunt Tara and uncle Ayodha gets an official entry into their house, - where his sister worked as a servant, - as a performer, as a *Brahmin* and as a *Reader*, identities contingent on his performance, identities distinct from his sister Dehuti's (49). Ayodha could read but thought it more dignified being read to: so the school boy Biswas had to read out a syndicated American column called *That Body of Yours* which dealt everyday with a different danger to the human body to Ayodha. He wondered why Ayodha subjected himself to the torment and how Dr Samul S. Pitkin could 'keep the column going with such regularity.' The column, the reader and the listener configure to become a paradigm of a mimetic reading practice and performance. The word and the world are the disjunctive spaces and the reader situates himself somewhere in-between here and there. The *t/hereness* of the fiction is translated to *hereness* through the ritualistic, repetitive act of reading in private and public spheres of home and school. Biswas had read *That Body of Yours* to Ayodha for a penny per session, - years later his son Anand did the same for six cents.

Here is an instance of the uncanny doubling of undifferentiated identities forged by the 'Imperial texts of theirs' to keep going the system of exploitation fed by the labour of the people and in turn, feeding their imagination with white, metropolitan mythologies.⁶ Biswas was taken out of school when he was learning 'Bingen on the Rhine' from *Bell's Standard Elocutionist* for the visit of the school inspector. The aborted public performance uncannily haunts the private sphere of home. Anand, the son of Mr. Biswas, finding his uncle and aunt sad, recites 'Bingen on the Rhine' from *Bell's Standard Elocutionist* to 'animate' them. Hari was ill and about to die; he knew this and so did his wife; their response to the words of the dying legionnaire

encouraged the innocent boy who knew nothing about Hari's state. He was pleased to see that looks of utmost solemnity replaced the smiles of Hari and his wife. Hari's wife broke into tears as the poem ended with,

*'Tell her the last night of my life, for ere this moon be risen,'
'My body will be out of pain, my soul be out of prison.'* (415)

Anand took their response to be a sure sign of his effectiveness as a performer. Naipaul allows events to speak with their own inherent irony.

The *Standard Elocutionist*, which Biswas did not have the opportunity of returning to his Canadian Mission school when he left it, became a part of Biswas's life. It was a continuation of the past, a part of the emerging history of a person who needed to collect and possess to be accommodated in a house he would own one day; 'Wherever he went the book went with him, and ended in the blacksmith -built bookcase in the house at Sikkim Street.' (30)

III

The absurd reality or the real absurdity of this reading situation which Naipaul mercilessly portrays is a phase in the cultural history of a people gradually becoming conscious of their difference from the world of the books that came from another location. *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius & *Discourses* of Epictetus were gifts from Mrs. Weir the owner of a small sugar-estate. Mr Biswas's family perfectly appropriated them as household names in a private myth signifying superior culture: a myth that could distinguish one of the dependant sons-in-law of the Tulsi family. When there is a family quarrel Biswas commands his daughter,

'-the next time she (her aunt Chinta) opens her big

mouth- you just ask her whether she has ever read Marcus Aurelius (232).' Marcus Aurelius was his refuge in distress, in loneliness and shame.

Chinta's revenge too is as bookish when she makes his son recite 'The Three Little Piggies. By Sir Alfred Scott-Gatty' (233). In the private circle of the family the recital is another of the performances through which another dependant member of Hanuman House claims her right to dignity. In a public sphere, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus had their rightful owners, readers and interpreters. When Biswas appears for an interview with the editor of a newspaper, this is how the dialogue proceeds:

'I have read a lot.' Mr. Biswas said,
The editor played with a slab of lead.
'Hall Caine, Marie Corelli, Jacob Boehme, Mark Twaine.
Hall Caine, Mark Twaine, Mr Biswas repeated.
'Samuel Smiles.'
The editor looked up.
'Marcus Aurelius.'
The editor smiled.
'Epictetus.'

The editor continued to smile, and Mr Biswas smiled back, to let the editor know that he knew he was sounding absurd.

'You read those books for pleasure,eh.?'

Mr Biswas recognized the cruel intent of the question, but he did not mind. 'No,' he said, 'Just for the encouragement.' (320-1; my emphasis)

The smile, the look, the cruel intent of the question,- the interview, a grotesque game of the absurd - divest Mr Biswas of all his learning, nullify all his efforts at educating himself to reassign him a job and put him 'in his place.' He had sought the interview with the editor

for a job as a writer; he got the job he had begun his career with, -that of a sign painter. Outside the enclosure of the newspaper office the effigy of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus painted, 'No Admittance. No Entry. No Hands Wanted.' Metonymically refigured, Mr Biswas, the marginal man at home, is reduced to one of the multitudes of hands serving the interest of metropolitan power.

IV

The 'No Admittance', 'No Entry' sign, which Biswas painted on the wall, could be read as an official authentication of the personal feeling of being debarred from entering into the world of the English and European texts. In his unsuspecting childhood, Biswas had read the descriptions of bad weather in foreign countries with delight; they had the mesmerizing quality of making him forget the heat and the sudden rain, which was all he knew. But the process of maturation through the sundry phases of failed sign-painter, driver, overseer, and shopkeeper forced him to acknowledge that though his philosophical books gave him solace they were not suited to his situation. The novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli introduced him to intoxicating worlds, they made him despair of finding romance in his own dull green land (78). Reading alienated him from his own location by re-presenting its difference as lack.

His experience of Samuel Smiles was no different. This Victorian cult author propagating, with illustrations, the reward of Self-Help, Duty, Courage, Patience, Endurance, Thrift and other virtues gripped the imagination of the Industrial and Imperial nation. Material success and consequent class-mobility were supposed to follow these properties of character. Naipaul foregrounds the epistemic locations in the signifying process:

[h]e stayed in the back trace and read Samuel Smiles. He had bought one of his books in the belief that it was a novel, and had become an addict. Samuel Smiles was as romantic and satisfying as any novelist, and Mr Biswas saw himself in many Samuel Smiles heroes: he was young, he was poor, and he fancied he was struggling. But there always came a point when resemblance ceased. The heroes had rigid ambitions and lived in countries where ambitions could be pursued and had a meaning. He had no ambition, and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motorbus, what could he do? What could he invent? Dutifully, however, he tried. He bought elementary manuals of science and read them; nothing happened; he only became addicted to elementary manuals of science. He bought the seven expensive volumes of *Hawkins' Electrical Guide*, made rudimentary compasses, buzzars, and doorbells, and learned to wind an armature. Beyond that he could not go. Experiments became more complex, and he did not know where in Trinidad he could find the equipment mentioned so casually in Hawkins. His interest in electrical matters died, and *he contented himself with reading about the Samuel Smiles heroes in their magic land.* (78-79; my emphasis)

In marginal spaces where the intimations of the hegemonic center is disseminated through innocuous literary specimens, a book written to 'impress' and 'invigorate' young minds [Smiles, 10] to meaningful action leading to progress and prosperity is disinvested of its intended purpose and read as a fairy tale. It is not only readers, but also locations of reading that reinvest texts with meaning.

Like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, Samuel Smiles

also had become a part of the private myth: when his wife points out that they are not doing anything in the shop they have started, Biswas replies, 'All right, Mrs. Smiles... You want me to make the spinning jenny and the flying shuttle? Invent the steam engine?' (192) Samuel Smiles 'depressed him acutely' (182, 159). Yet, Smiles was passed on to his son Anand; Biswas read Anand *Self-Help* and on his birthday gave him *Duty*. The young boy 'following the example of those Samuel Smiles heroes who had in youth concealed the brilliance of their later years, did what he could to avoid school.' Biswas had to remind him that 'pranks' were a part of the myth of English composition.' (382) Between father and son they enact the different phases of the lives of the Samuel Smiles heroes only to 'realize the fictional potential of metropolitan discourses and the debilitating power of reading. In the changing situation of Trinidad, when others were making money in contact with the American people, driving American's in their taxis, hiring out their lorries to them, buying new houses and cars!' Mr. Biswas found himself barred from this money, despite Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, despite Samuel Smiles (438).

V

In this shadow-life standing in a void reading induced pathological symptoms of 'depression', 'addiction', 'frenzy', 'delirium', 'fear'. Political books provided Biswas with phrases only to speak to himself and use to his wife; they increased his helplessness and isolation. It is at this point Biswas discovered the solace of Dickens. In the grotesques of Dickens everything he feared and suffered from was ridiculed and diminished, so that his anger, his own contempt became unnecessary. Putting himself on the side of the grotesque Biswas discovers himself as

well: his world is something more than an innocuous shadow, - it is a caricature, a burlesque or a parody that survives and sustains itself through acts of mindless repetition. As a signifier of authority, the English book, as Bhabha points out, 'acquires its meaning *after* the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial (107).' A reader like Biswas discovers his origins in Dickens's grotesques. The moment of discovery is paradoxically a moment of repetition.

The only recuperating performance would be to reclaim oneself. Indoctrinated to think that history is that which grows out of achievement Biswas, like the schoolboys in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, was deeply convinced that he had no story/history of his own to narrate (48). His experiences of reading the master-narratives of the metropolis, his soul-denying role of the grotesque ventriloquist ultimately impinge on him the necessity of finding his own voice. Biswas begins to tell his children about his childhood, - the story of poverty, suffering and homelessness. Samuel Smiles' heroes begin being replaced by the heroes of Trinidad whom education helped to locate themselves in the metropolis. However, the geographical re-location does not guarantee any freedom of mind. Owad, back from England lives off names like Eliot,

'Eliot,' he told Anand. 'Used to see him a lot. American, you know. *The Waste Land*. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Let us go then, you and I. Eliot is a man I simply loathe'.

And at the school Anand said, 'Eliot is a man I simply loathe'; and added, 'I know someone who knows him.' (544)

Living in the outskirts of metropolitan Modernism and brought up on the poems in the *Royal Reader* and *Bell's Standard Elocutionist*, Biswas, the aspiring writer,

understood little of Lorca, Eliot and Auden. He too was oppressed by a sense of loss: but not of the present loss but of something missed in the past. He read a lot of modern prose; knew all about faceless heroes and absence of endings but his own efforts were the series of unfinished stories he failed to complete. Biswas's experience of belatedness, inadequacy and failure becomes a peripheral version of the metropolitan aesthetics of absence and loss.

The importance of reading in *A House for Mr Biswas* may be literally substantiated by reproducing a list of books mentioned in it.⁷ In his ontological space books threaten Mr. Biswas, challenge him, comfort him, provide him solace, help him to negotiate, or hinder him from negotiating with his environment and milieu, they reduce him to nobody, they inspire him to be somebody. Books thus become an integral component in the making of the subjects of such 'half-made societies' (1974, 233).

VI

In the chapter 'Asymmetry between Text and Reader' Iser makes some significant observations on the differences between reading and social interaction and in the process brings up the pertinent issues of contingency, frame of reference and inexperienceability and failure of communication help us understand the reading situations as represented in the writings of Naipaul.

An obvious and major difference between reading and all major forms of social interaction is the fact that with reading there is no *face-to-face situation*. A text cannot adapt itself to each reader with whom it comes in contact. The partners in dyadic interaction can ask each other questions in order to ascertain how far their views have controlled contingency, or their images have bridged the

gap of inexperienceability of one another's experience... [in dyadic situations / interaction always has a regulative context, which often serves as a *tertium comparationis*. Here is no such frame of reference governing the text-reader relationship; on the contrary, the codes which might regulate the interaction are fragmented in the text and must first be reassembled or, in most cases, restructured before any frame of reference can be established... (166-67).

Another reading of Gray's Elegy would be pertinent at this point to show the way such frames of reference, contingency and asymmetry may provoke an interaction through which the colonial subject tries to recuperate. In *Half A Life* an editor says : 'But we who live in dark corners have our souls. We have had our dreams, and life can play cruel tricks on us. ...Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid some heart once pregnant with celestial fire'. I cannot hope to match the poet Gray, but I have written *in my own way* of a heart like that' (99, my emphasis). This performance,- similar others as the one in *A House for Mr Biswas*⁸ - signifies the 'dismantling of a colonial structure of awareness' (*Pleasures*, 36) : the written word is the inscription of the liberation of the imagination from the alienating coercive structures of thought.

Notes and References

1. 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', *The Golden Treasury*, Francis T Palgrave 1861, repr. 1971, 172-175.
2. Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, 'Pravat Barnan' in *Sishusiskha*, First pub. 1849.
3. *Godhuli* : a Bengali word lit., signifying the time of the day when dust is raised by the hooves of the cows retuning to their fold, ie., dusk.
4. In *The Mystic Masseur*, the Headmaster of the school in Port of Spain where Ganesh was serving as a teacher reminded him that 'the purpose of the school is to form and not to inform (14)'
5. Two of the 'House' texts that come to mind are *Bleak House*,

Wuthering Heights. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* is a classic postcolonial text.

In my earlier version of this article, *Going By the Book: Textual Materialism in V.S.Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas* I had argued that *A House for Mr. Biswas* may be read as an allegory of the process of reading the text and the world through and in contact of which the oppressed subject can recognize the 'normative horizons (Chakrabarty, 20)' specific to his existence and pertinent to the assessment of his life and its possibilities. (Journal of the Department of English, Special Issue, New Literatures in English, Vol.XXXII, Nos 1 & 2, 2005-6,261-272).

6. A representative example of this may be found in Erna Brodber's *Myal* where we find Kipling's *White Man's Burden* is recited in a Jamaican primary classroom (6).
7. See 'Going by the Book:...' (Journal of the Department of English, Special Issue, New Literatures in English, Vol.XXXII, Nos 1 & 2, 2005-6,269-70)
8. See, *A House for Mr Biswas*, 356-57.

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THE 22 INTO 22 CARAT STORY

ALKA SARAOGI

When I was asked to speak to a class full of seasoned academicians about literature, I was stupefied. What I could tell them about the topic that they might not know already, I wondered. A writer constructs a world through words and the job is over. Now it is for the discerning critic or the professor to find out and explain to the real world the meaning, the range, the architecture - in short the worth of that constructed world. The parameters, from which the professor judges a piece of writing, might be the last things that the writer had ever thought about.

Yet, I felt that there was a point of convergence for everyone connected with the written word. It is nothing else but the joy that all of us derive in deciphering life through the 'construct' that is literature. At times it is the reader more than the writer who has a deeper understanding of this world, not to mention the critic or

the teacher of literature. In any case, all of us are bound together by the joy of discovering ever new nuances of life in the world of words that a text offers with every further reading.

How does a writer transmit the joy of discovery and creation to the reader is as problematic just as it is for the teacher of literature to transmit to the student.

And what are the options available to us in our jobs?

The question of options, incidentally reminds me of an anecdote: A famous writer and a professor met at a seminar. They were taken to visit a reputed psychiatric clinic together by a doctor, who also happened to be among the audience in the seminar. The writer asked the doctor, 'How do you identify a person as one who really needs your help?' The professor said, 'Indeed, how do you decide?' The doctor told them that whenever a new patient came, they took him to a bathtub filled with water and asked him to empty out the bathtub with any of the three options: A spoon, a bowl and a bucket. 'Oh, really, is it so simple' both the writer and the professor exclaimed together, 'Naturally a normal person would use the bucket.' The doctor shook his head and said, 'No, he would remove the stopper of the bathtub.' So much for options – given and setting the limits to possibilities.

I had two stints of teaching Hindi literature – part-time in a college. I found to my dismay that the evolved patterns of teaching and learning were so deeply entrenched- even fossilized, that any option to introduce new ways of thinking, reading and writing were nearly impossible. When I talked to the students to break free of pre-fixed modes of writing answers to the same questions that had kept on reappearing almost every alternate year for the last two decades or so, they looked at me as if I had come from some other planet and was speaking to them in an alien language or incomprehensible gibberish. I slowly realized that if I wanted them to think and write

by some other design, I had to give them the blueprint – preconceived and tailor-made in black and white. The uncharted path of creative space in thoughts and words was something that either frightened them or just put them off. I am not sure if this is the case with teaching literature as well.

Teaching is the noblest profession, where you give so much of yourself to others. I found myself quite unsuitable to the job and came back to the relative freedom of writing, to a world full of as many options as one wants to have. But again, the question raised its head. How many options can a writer really exercise so that it does not tamper with the basic tenets of the story or the novel itself? How far was the art of storytelling still governed by, well, the elements of storytelling?

It seems to me that this question incorporates one of the basic differences between an Indian-English writer and writers like me, writing in their mother tongue. The “form” of the story or novel, for some reason or other, never bothered the regional language writer or the Bhasha writer as much as it must have engaged the one writing in English. Perhaps it was after the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, that the Indian-English writer felt liberated in many ways – to experiment with the form, to make the art of storytelling as inclusive of other genres as possible and to elevate the story from a linear narrative to one that was not bound by the constraints of time and space or the given reality so as to fly high into the realms of imagination. On the other hand, the regional writer continued to be bogged down by the sorrows and burdens of the marginalized sections of the society – the dalits, the women, the deprived. There was really not much scope to be playful, except by taking recourse to being obviously satirical. The feet of the Bhasha writer were not only on the ground, but perhaps stuck deep into the mire of reality. A metaphor came to

my mind recently about this difference in perspective: The Indian-English writer perhaps was on board an aircraft where he had a wider, sweeping view of the geography of reality with the details smudged out, while the bhasha writer walked in that geography, too preoccupied with details for any flight of imagination.

Amit Chaudhuri wrote in *The New Statesman*, "The Indian writer in English must be co-opted into this narrative of success and record growth; anything else, during this watershed, is looked upon with anxiety. The writer mustn't cause anxiety: in our family romance, he is the son-in-law – someone we can be proud of, can depend on, who is above all, a safe investment."

Well, this is a general observation, which can not be true for all writings either in English or other bhashas. But surely when Prof. Harish Trivedi of Delhi University reviewed my first novel *Kalikatha via Bypass* in the Book-Review, he had his reasons in putting this caption on his piece- 'A Woman writes the Nation- In Hindi'. Firstly he was pointing out to the fact that this novel was not the stuff that is usually and quiet offensively categorized as 'woman writing' and secondly to the fact that something new was happening in Hindi that changed the landscape of Hindi writing.

But rather than dwelling upon the differences in concerns that occupy the Bhasha writers vis-à-vis the Indian—English writers, I would like to share my creative process during the writing of my first novel *Kalikatha via bypass* with you. I hope that this will lead me to explain why I chose the title of this presentation to be 'The 22 into 22 Carat Story'.

The novel had initially started only as a short story with the title 'Beechwala kamra kahan hai' or 'Where is the middle room?' The protagonist Kishore Babu, a 72-yr old gentleman wakes up at home one morning after coming back from the hospital after a heart bypass

surgery. His wife asks him if he will take his tea in the middle room as he normally did before the operation. Kishore babu asks her in wonder, 'But where is the middle room? There are just two rooms - the big room and the small room.' Kishore Babu is actually transported back in memory to his house at North Calcutta with only two rooms where he had spent more than two decades of his life before moving to South Calcutta to a bigger house.

At this point, the story stopped in its tracks. I had no idea what life had been for K. babu when he lived in a small rented house at Burrabazaar in the 1940s at the age of 15. I needed to go back in time to reconstruct that period when I was not born. This led me to contend with Time itself and the innumerable stories of this time and the time before and the one beyond even that time. It was as if I was standing in front of a tree-clad green mountain and had to excavate the Elephanta caves with their myriad stories. There was the time when the Marwari diaspora had begun migration from the deserts of today's Rajasthan to the greener pastures of British Calcutta at the beginning of the 20th century. There was the time connected to the city of Calcutta itself from Job Charnock and the clearing of the marshes by the Zamindaars to their days of decline due to extravagance, so that the Marwari traders found a place as compradors or Banians to the British firms. There was the time when K. babu had felt ashamed of himself in front of his schoolmates -the Gandhian Amolak and his Bengali friend Shantanu, a follower of the firebrand Subhash Chandra Bose, that he could not serve Bharat Mata in any way due to family commitments. And there was the time in K. babu's life after independence when moving from 'Somewhere in the North' to South Calcutta had become the sole motive of his existence.

The time when the story of *Kalikatha* began was actually 1997, when India was celebrating its 50 years of Independence with great fanfare. It was also a time when

lots of septuagenarians and octogenarians whom I met to reconstruct the 1940s, were wondering if there was any reason to celebrate with half of the population still below the poverty line. It was the time when Gandhi had become redundant in a country with no residue of idealism that had once charged the country during its fight for freedom.

I had to capture all of this time along with its moral register, which spread specifically from the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 to the present. I gave titles to chapters to find some semblance to capture this time back and forth, like The Great Calcutta killing of 1946 and The Famine of 1943. But there were tones of documented evidence from the archives; there was the changing map of the city of Calcutta in the 300 odd years and bagfuls of yellowed pages of family letters and diaries in front of me besides the vivid flooding memories of the people I met. How could all this be told while the story still remained a story? Could the story of the novel carry this whole burden on its shoulder?

But I would come to this question later because I feel compelled to do some actual storytelling at this juncture. Let me read out the first chapter of *Kalikatha* to you, to make my case and come to the 22 into 22 carat metaphor, which was devised by none other than the protagonist K. babu himself to tell his story.

As you can probably make out, the 22 into 22 carat metaphor must have come to my mind for different reasons. As I turned back to catch the narrative as a plausible whole, to make it an authentic story told by the 72-yr old Kishore babu, I felt that there had to be more than one narrating voices here who told the narrative in different ways. There was the form of the old method of linear storytelling that a person of Kishore babu's age was more likely to adhere to. On the other hand, the multi-layered complexity of life that surrounded him as well his amanuensis combined with the ever new ways of

storytelling knocking persistently on the door, demanded improvisations in telling this particular story — the story of an ordinary man from the margins of history.

Thus emerged the framework of *Kalikatha* with different narrating voices interacting with each other to tell a story effectively. They agreed and disagreed with each other within the story itself on what could be incorporated in the story or what was outside its periphery, if ever there could be one. The narrator Kishore babu was 72-yr old in 1997, but his amanuensis' age, gender and relationship with the narrator was not given. The amanuensis remained anonymous. It was a nobody, but it was very much there all the way.

Now if any critic thought that this was a totally new way of storytelling or a new architecture was being evolved, I at least disagreed with him. We have all heard of the epic Mahabharata dictated by the Sage Vyasa to the writer Ganesha. In fact, within the seven-day Bhagvat Katha, that was once held at my mother's place, I came to know that there had been a series of narrators and listeners who have narrated the story at different times. And who knows how different were they from each other? Perhaps we had the most convoluted and complex plots in our epics. In fact, when the eminent critic Dr. Namwar Singh compared *Kalikatha* with *Katha-sarit-sagar*, he had rightly caught the resonances vibrating in the novel.

To come to the narrator in *Kalikatha*, Kishore babu puts down his foot that he wants his storytelling to be pure to the tune of 22 carats, allowing other elements to be blended to the minimum. This is again for the critic to decide whether his wishes have been adhered to, but as for me I knew it from the judgment of my mother's sister, an ordinary reader with no claim to critical understanding of literature, that it was a 'story' alright. The wide sweep of encompassing story ??? history had not detracted her

from connecting to the dilemmas of the protagonist or the pain of the silent women in the novel or the collective memories of the Marwari diaspora at Calcutta or to the anguish of the newly resurrected Kishore babu jay walking the streets of Calcutta like a tramp, mulling over the values of a lost world.

The 22 carat metaphor also speaks of my self-consciousness as a storyteller. Deeply conscious as I am of the process and act of writing itself while writing, I find it often becoming part of the narrative. I somehow feel that I owe it to my integrity in some way to share my fears and dilemmas with the narrative itself. This sharing makes my heart lighter and at times I feel light enough to fly to the realm of the absurd or the mysterious. It kind of opens me up and makes writing the joyful activity that it is not always otherwise : most of the times it keeps me on my toes with self-criticism and deep restlessness. But sharing it with the narrative, making all this a part of the text itself, gives me a certain amount of relaxation and even happiness.

In many of my short stories, like *Kalikatha* there are storytellers as characters within the story. There are fumbling storytellers like Kishore babu, who are not sure how a story is to be told and what to say and what not to say. They are continuously debating with themselves and others about the age-old art of storytelling which cannot afford to be just one linear narrative in an age of information explosion and the variety of concerns that engage the writer with ever increasing complexity of life. But they are also wary of letting the story go out of their hands and become something else. There is another breed of storytellers in my stories like the one titled '*The Death of a Tree*'. In this story the protagonist Jagannath dada is continuously weaving and telling stories to an enraptured audience, much like his handicapped father who did the same sitting in a wheelchair all his life. They are perhaps

genetically programmed storytellers of the perfect kind because they tell stories that their listeners never want to come to an end.

What is a perfect story? It has perhaps always been a variable data from Stone Age to today. I think that a perfect story or a novel today has a reader in mind who can be kept engaged by the written word despite the various distractions and pulls that life surrounds him/her with. But then does it need to degenerate into a thriller kind of a narrative? Obviously not. Hypothetically speaking, a perfect story is the perfect blend of the basic elements of storytelling and it portrays reality not without playful imagination, draws from myths, history, fables, information and even something more, yet one that always remains essentially and simply a story.

The written word has supremacy in an area that no other medium can match - it is the inclusion of memories and references and allusions that might go back in time infinite. You never know when a very contemporary text can remind you of something of Shakespeare or Milton or Chaucer. Writing itself in a way is always anthological to some extent.

A narrative, to me, is most often a story that acquires a body, however intangible, at someplace sometime within me without being written. When one writes, it is to give this old formless story a visible body. But the memory of the old amorphous body of the earlier story is always there. It is always the 'second story', as the name of one of my collection of short stories suggests. It is written on the remembered invisible presence of the first story. This second story is deeply steeped in time, for it might have germinated from the memories of my ancestors within my veins, who yet again might have had the memories of their own ancestors within them. Our narratives are cast in the present, but the references, literary and mundane, go way back in time. We can almost touch that time gone

by if we just turn a little and extend our hands, because time is eternally being welded into timelessness.

When stories draw their life from memories, there is no reason for the existence of a linear notion of time. In any case, the storytelling traditions in our part of the globe have never thought much of a linear time always going forward, much like memories that are almost never linear. The richness of a text, in my opinion, depends to a large extent on the volume and strength of memories it is able to invoke in a reader. In other words, the more associations a reader can make with the story through his own memory, the more it captures his mind and soul. The reader in fact is always writing a parallel story of his own because he is continuously adding his own remembered associations to a story.

I am a great believer that all narratives should have an element of fun for the writer as well as for the reader. But again, the definition of fun varies from person to person, from culture to culture and from language to language. Actually the very concept of fun or humour has a referential context in the past along with the immediate contemporary references. Of course, one can be very innovative, but I suppose it is like walking a tightrope when one can easily slip into flippancy. For instance, not everybody would exactly find it humorous or in good taste if I named the pet dog in my story as Manmohan Singh.

The teacher of literature has to teach the same text to every new batch of students every year. It might lead to a honing of skills in making the student appreciate the creative aspect of the text, provided the teacher has not got bored of it and hence teaches in a mechanical manner. This is only possible when the teacher keeps rediscovering the text in new ways and the text can move him in some way. Another problem, I presume is that the teacher has to categorize a text, say as post-colonial or post-modern

or what-have-you to make it more comprehensible to the student. What option do we have than to classify literature into periods of history according to characteristics, define and enlist the trends and give examples to relate it to particular texts? Probably, the option would be to make every lecture full of references and cross-references-planned and unplanned- so that the teaching is full of surprises for the teacher as well, just as it is for the writer when he or she creates it. Mostly it is planned and unplanned at the same time.

The writer, indeed, is scared of being caged into any of the marketable categories that the critic always seems to have at its disposal. The writer has reasons to protest against being dissected, scrutinized and labeled for a particular shelf in the corner of literature. Somehow it eats into the creative space of the writer. It puts some kind of pressure on the writer to create in certain modes.

There is a lot of pressure today on the writer to create something new or something that has been recognized as new. It must have there for writers of all times always, but surely there is a difference. Probably being part of a globalized world market has got something to do with it. At a conference in France, an Indian writer writing in English was asked why was incest such a common and popular theme in Indian English writing. In fact, Salman Rushdie admitted at a talk in Calcutta a few years back that one of his readers had pointed this out to him that there was an incestuous character in all of his books and he realized that he had gone too far with it.

It would be a great pity if rules of marketing guided the writers in creation in any way. Writers today certainly have to identify such pressures on their creativity and consciously work against them. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that today such subtle pressures are the most potent factors that regulate and censor creativity. No matter what, we all are part of a huge consumerist

culture and we have to defend the creative space from encroachment from all sides. Without this, to be able to create literature or appreciate and transmit the joy, understanding and appreciation of literature to the student will increasingly become difficult. For all one knows, every class of students might be harbouring a potential creative writer. He must have a taste of unhindered creative space to truly imbibe a love of literature. As for the writer, perhaps it was never so difficult to write a simple story as it is today and hence the need of 22 into 22 carat story – mostly the quintessential story with a little of something more.

TIME, SPACE, AND VIOLENCE

DIPANKAR PURKAYASTHA

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

.....

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes

Time and space are inseparable in narrative :

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion characterizes the artistic chronotope [Bakhtin,184].

This paper would examine an African American work of fiction, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, and a novel representing the North East of India, Sidhartha Deb's *Surface* as narratives where time, space, and violence meet to interrogate history.

In African American literature memory brings together time, space and violence in an indelible and complex bond. For a people, for whom time stretches back to include the ancestor, and physical space stretches wide to include Africa, the Middle Passage and America, space is "not an immaterial idea but rather the embodiment of cultural, political and psychological phenomenon" which "is always, to some degree, social." [Cavallaro, 170]. Memory becomes a "receptacle for collective imagination". [Cavallaro, 177] Toni Morrison takes this interrelation between the imagination and memory as crucial to the art of narration:

The act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened up the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and lively acreage. . . . Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that. Remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory – what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding'. [119]

The river, the flooding, the valley, the banks, and the route back to roots, the original place, constitute the chronotope to body forth the time of violence encountered

by the collective imagination. The 'emotional memory' recollects and recreates time in terms of space, best exemplified in the quilt metaphor central to the African American cultural imagination. A quilt is a physical space in which the constituting pieces of fabric have a narrative of their own, as representative of heightened moments of experience and lives lived in suffering, resistance and survival. The quilt assumes the power of a chronotopic metaphor.

For the African Americans, experiencing over time the pains of slavery and segregation, violence is as much physical as psychological, and this complex experience is represented in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, a narration of the lives of seven African American women who have different experiences of displacement and have gone through individual experiences of migration to finally arrive at Brewster Place, which itself has a history of its own, spanning widely diverse ethnic configuration. As a physical space it signifies the problem of 'color line' as manifested in the perennial problem of housing confronted by blacks. Made up of four double-housing units, "Brewster Place was the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company." [*Brewster Place*, 1]. Inhabited first by families of Irish descent, it has been witness to migration and gradual decline, to be replaced first by "people who were dark haired and mellow-skinned – Mediterraneans – who spoke to each other in rounded guttural sounds and who brought strange foods to the neighborhood stores." [2] They did not have the political clout enjoyed by the earlier inhabitants; and hence, when the older residents were offended by their food habits, Brewster Place lost the battle for remaining a part of a major business district and was walled off as an auxiliary street and became a dead-end space. It contracts in itself the

political history of multi-ethnic United States and its tensions and contestations, assuming the status of a chronotopic image, the meaning of which is further expanded with the introduction of the African Americans as inhabitants.

Naylor links the first black presence in Brewster Place with a climactic moment in African American history:

A year before the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* realigned the entire country, integration came to Brewster Place on the rounded shoulders of a short, brown-skinned man who had been hired as janitor and handyman for the buildings. [3]

The entry of Ben, the janitor, in the midst of the earlier inhabitants, Irish and Mediterraneans, and it being linked to the Supreme Court decision which enforced integration, further enhances the meaning of the location as chronotope. Ben is followed by other blacks, whom Naylor refers to as "Brewster Place's third generation of children, who drifted into the block and precipitated the exodus of the remaining Mediterraneans." They are people who had come to stay as housing was a problem for them and they had no choice. They sum up in their lives and experiences the political and cultural history of their community since the days of slavery in the South and the migrations thereafter:

Brewster Place rejoiced in these multi-colored "Afric" children of its old age. . . . They clung to the street with a desperate acceptance that whatever was here was better than the starving southern climates they had fled from. Brewster Place knew that unlike its other children, the few who would leave forever were to be the exception rather than the rule, since they came because they

had no choice and would remain for the same reason. [4]

The experiences of these "Afric" children relate to the sufferings and failures of the days of Reconstruction which frustrated the blacks and deferred their dreams of a better deal after emancipation, and the subsequent violence encountered by them. The block of buildings constituting Brewster Place turns into a receptacle of violent time.

The narrative of the lives of the seven women, the present or third generation inhabitants of Brewster Place, is framed by two acts of violence. The coming up of the wall is referred to as the second baptism, "which took place at three o'clock in the morning when Mrs. Colligan's son, stumbling home drunk and forgetting the wall was there, bloodied his nose and then leaned over and vomited against the new bricks." [2] Towards the end of the novel is narrated the rape of Lorraine by five boys and her subsequent killing of old Ben, the first black inhabitant of the blocks, again an act of blood being spilled in misplaced hatred. Lorraine was raped by C.C. Baker; and Naylor describes the boys in terms of the history of deprivation, segregation, and violence encountered by the African American youth over time:

Bound by the last building on Brewster and a brick wall, they reigned in that unlit alley like dwarfed warrior kings. Born with the appendages of power, circumcised by a guillotine, and baptized with the steam from a million nonreflective mirrors, these young men wouldn't be called upon to thrust a bayonet into an Asian farmer, target a torpedo, scatter their iron seed from a B-52 into the wound of the earth, point a finger to move a nation, or stick a pole into the moon – and they knew it. They only had the three-hundred-foot

alley to serve them as stateroom, armored tank, and executioner's chamber. [169 -70]

The whole of African American history, from the days of the warrior-kings in the distant past in distant Africa across the Atlantic, the World War II, the Vietnam War, the might of America, the glory of the moon-mission, and the exclusion of the African American from partaking of that glory, is contracted in the three-hundred-foot alley, where "Lorraine found herself, on her knees, surrounded by the most dangerous species in existence – human males with an erection to validate in a world that was only six feet wide." [170] Male violence on women becomes a part of the wider history of violence, accruing from deprivation and frustration, of miscarriages of power, where the phallic joins the racial to dwarf the individual. The three-hundred-feet by six feet alley, on which stands Brewster Place, turn out to be a chronotope image where African American time and place intersect in all their manifestations of violence.

Lorraine mistakes Ben to be the rapist and kills him : "–the brick smashed down into his mouth. His teeth crumbled into his throat and his body swung back against the wall. Lorraine brought the brick down again to stop the moving head, and blood shot out of his ears, splattering against the can and bottom of the wall." [172 – 73]. The blood-letting against the wall is a counterpart to and a culmination of the development set in motion by Mrs. Colligan's son's bleeding his nose at the wall when it had just come up. The two acts frame the narrative defining Brewster Place as a chronotope image. The plan for the block party goes awry; yet, Mattie Michael – the matriarchal figure who symbolizes in her portrayal, black women's experience across time and space, dreams of the women of Brewster Place having a party and tearing apart

the blood-stained wall, which segregates their constricted space from the larger American space.

Cora pulled Sonya's hand away from the wall and uncovered a dark stain on the edge of the brick that the child had been scraping. The stain began to widen and deepen. . . . "Blood – there's still blood on this wall," Cora whispered, and dropped to her knees. She took the Popsickle stick and started digging around the loose mortar near the brick. [185]

If the Brewster women are to come out of their isolation and integrate with the larger American dream, the history of blood and violence has to be overcome; Brewster Place has to go through another transformation to achieve a new identity, which again has to be got through one more final act of violence:

Women flung themselves against the wall, chipping away at it with knives, plastic forks, spiked shoe heels, and even bare hands; the water pouring under their chins, plastering their blouses and dresses against their breasts and into the cracks of their hips. The bricks piled up behind them and were snatched and relayed out of Brewster Place past overturned tables, scattered coins, and crushed wads of dollar bills. They came back with chairs and barbecue grills and smashed them into the wall. [186]

The throwing out of the bricks of the wall which defined Brewster Place as a segregated space also implies a throwing out of a large expanse of time marked by the history of racial and gender violence. That the act occurs in Mattie's dream is structurally significant in that Mattie, in her narrative, compacts the many other narratives of suffering and resistance that black women had to tell.

In the structuring of the many narratives which constitute the larger inclusive narrative of *The Women of Brewster Place*, Mattie's story is the framing presence. Her's is a story of migration, displacement, desertion, yet also of determination to struggle and survive. In relation to the other women in Brewster Place she gradually assumes the role of a community mother, caring and protective. This quality is emphasized at the point of her introduction. Coming from the sunny rural South to the dark, dismal alley, her primary concern is that of caring for her potted plants:

Mattie saw that the wall reached just above the second-floor apartments, which meant that the northern lights would be blocked from her plants. All the beautiful plants that once had an entire sun porch for themselves in the home she had exchanged thirty years of her life to pay for would now have to fight for light on a crowded windowsill. The sigh turned into a knot of pity for the ones that she knew would die. [7]

The concern and care for the plants would in the course of her time in Brewster Place embrace the lives of the other women equally suffering from lack of sunshine, and in the course of the narrative would expand to identify itself with yet larger space and time. After Ciel had lost her child in a tragic accident, Mattie takes on the role of a comforting mother figure, and Naylor's description at this point of the narrative expands the presence of Mattie across time and space :

Ciel moaned. Mattie rocked. Propelled by the sound, Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time. She rocked her over Aegean seas so clean they shone like crystal, so

clear the fresh blood of sacrificed babies torn from their mother's arms and given to Neptune could be seen like pink froth on the water. She rocked her on and on, past Dachau, where soul-gutted Jewish mothers swept their children's entrails off laboratory floors. They flew past the spilled brains of Senegalese infants whose mothers had dashed them on the wooden sides of slave ships. And she rocked on. [103]

Such expansion, structured across and including wider manifestations of violence in time and space – in history, enhances the power of significance of the chronotope, which in turn places both the representation and understanding of racial violence in a more universal perspective. Mattie Michael and the other women at Brewster Place not only signify the tribulations and trials in the lives of the African American women but of violence as it is traced back to times past to the pagan domain of the ancient myths, the anti-Semitic pogroms, and slavery – particularly the killing of children by their mothers during the Middle Passage, most evocatively represented by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*.

The expansion of the symbolic significance of Mattie adds to her structural role as the frame which binds the other stories, of the six other women, victims of racial and/or gender violence. In the course of the narrative Mattie gets interlaced with these stories as well as the street to deepen the chronotope.

If it is 'dead-end street' which assumes chronotopic significance in Naylor's novel, in certain novels related to representation of North East India, the whole region as such attains the status of a "literary artistic chronotope" in which "spatial and temporal indicators are fused." [Bakhtin, 184]. A demonstrative example is Sidhartha Deb's second novel, *Surface* (2005). The very mention of

North East India today evokes a traumatic experience. Politically, a region which is multiethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious, it is the scene of internecine conflict and violence tearing apart an otherwise beautiful geographic space. It is at the margin of the Indian nation and is a space that has experienced much migration and displacement of population. Indeed, the bulk of the population consists of people who had migrated across the borders over centuries. Links with the centre of the Indian nation is tenuous, which makes for a love-hate relationship. More recently, since the middle of the twentieth century, the space has become almost synonymous with violence. Deb's description of the space is revealing of a sense of alienation which explodes in violence: "Nothing could have been more forlorn. It seemed to me that the region had been forgotten by the world, and in the absence of connections with what lay beyond, an entire society was trying to create itself from selected memories and incomplete knowledge." [8] A failure of connections between the centre and the margin finds a tragic manifestation in inexplicable violence :

The insurgents had been in the region in one form or another for nearly four decades, crystallizing around different ethnic and tribal identities as a distant government in Delhi alternated between complete neglect and brute force. As I travelled deeper into the interior, I would find myself travelling a route riven by conflict, with shadowy armies meeting each other in fierce but inconclusive encounters.

Much of the region had been treated as different from the rest of India by the British, divided by an Inner Line that only colonial officials and Christian missionaries could cross freely. It was an area of perpetual separation, a museum

collection of tribal territories and princely states curated by a resident commissioner, and by the time of independence the notional line had become an unbreachable wall. The politicians and administrators in Delhi who determined how the region would fare in the fledgling nation should have anticipated this barrier, but their knowledge was partial, their lack of imagination absolute.

They faced the alienation of the local populations with contempt, a potent mixture that, like hot air meeting cold in the skies over the hills, produced thunderstorms of rebellion and repression. The Nagas rose first, then the Manipuris, then the Mizos, Assamese, Bodos and Hmars, and now intelligence reports spoke of as many as a hundred and fifty groups swirling in the vortex of the region, a discontented army of teenagers and young people sworn to similar but separate causes, moving stealthily along arms routes from jungle camps located in Bangladesh and Burma. (31)

Deb isolates the region as a space marginalized over time by the power brokers who had erected 'an unbreachable wall' to fix the 'other'. Violence characterizes the space and the time. The chaotic vortex that proclaims the region has been brewing up over decades, maybe centuries, since the colonial masters tinkered with the boundaries of the region to serve their designs.

The narrative time in *Surface* meanders through this space. The journey or search or quest motif binds the narrative, and the 'road' from "the main city in the region" [6] to the ultimate destination across the borders of Manipur into Myanmar, is the chronotope image. As the journalist protagonist, Amrit – from Delhi, the capital city

of the Republic – travels along the ‘road’, the narrative builds up, fleshing itself up with varied stories of violence culled from varied voices along the road:

Along the main road, which turned into a narrow, twisting highway once it left the offices and shops behind, there were new buildings being put up. Together with the soldiers and their sandbags, the half-finished structural frames rising from piles of sand, cement and gravel gave the city an air of impending siege, as if they were erecting not shopping centres and government offices but fortifications for one last, decisive battle. [6 – 7]

Along the road that takes Amrit across the region begins the quest to understand “at first hand the effects of the insurgency and violence on ordinary people.” [8] It is a quest itself motivated by another act of violence and the curiosity it had aroused, in a distant land. A German magazine was looking for: “‘Something exemplary ... A portrait of the mystery and sorrow of India through the story of the woman in the photograph’.” [5] The photograph is that of a woman supposed to have been executed by an insurgent group in Manipur. The quest along the road defined by violence turns into a journey to understand the mystery of the region and its tenuous ties with the larger nation space. It is an arduous task as “no story taking place in that region was ever quite complete, no individual a rounded figure, and the outline of the region itself was traced by blurred, fluid boundaries that shifted back and forth with each fresh incident.” [8]

The road itself is an epitome of the troubled region. Amrit’s contact, Robiul, warns him of the difficulties: “it would be impossible to find a driver willing to go all the way: different tribes, separate police forces, too many insurgent groups for a single man to depend on the protection money he paid out in any one place.” [55] There

are too many borders to cross and every border has its own quota of violence accrued over times of internecine conflicts. At every border again, identity is confused and confusing, as Amrit gets to know conversing with the care-taker at a Refinery Guest House at a border town between Assam and Nagaland: "I was puzzled by his speech. He sounded like a Bengali at times, an Oriya at other moments, sometimes even like a Nepali, though he didn't have the typical features or mountain build. The oiled hair and narrow frame spoke of the plains, as did his prominent vowels and sibilants." [76] The main point of course is: one has "to be cautious as to his ethnicity." [77] Survival in the violent space at violent times demands obfuscating of identity. Amrit sums up his experience of 'journeying' along the road in revealing words: "The towns I had travelled through in the past month or so had taught me many things, but no place imparted its lesson quite so well as Imphal. What I learned here was that disappearance is not an unusual thing at all. It can happen to anyone, at any point..." [211] It is not just a disappearance of an individual, Leela, or any one travelling in this uncertain region. It also is a disappearance of any sense of definiteness, of any sense of assured identity: people here were "provisional, uncertain, their responses taking place within single, discrete moments, their personalities determined by the whimsy of immediate acts" [8], with understanding and closure ever postponed.

Amrit's gaze moves along the road, gathering nuggets of experiences of violence from the many interlocutors he encounters on the quest. The construction of the gaze combines spaces, near and far; the perspective of a confused journalist from beyond the region combined with the distant desire of a German magazine for 'something exemplary' to exemplify 'the mystery and sorrow of India'. As the road meanders beyond Imphal

and Moreh to Tamu across the border with Myanmar, Leela remains elusive, and the onward journey ends at a miniature Japanese Garden – emblematic of the Japanese army's incursion to this region during World War II – created by a writer, film maker, script-writer – a purveyor of narratives in many genres. Expansive Time, inclusive in subsuming a larger span of history, is contracted in miniature space, in the miniature garden, signifying the larger space given meaning by the violence it had witnessed over time. The quest remains unfulfilled, yet time, space, and violence are interlaced in the narrative, and the chronotope image – the road, defining the inexplicable region, a witness to intractable time in postcolonial South Asia.

The generic configuration inherent in the chronotope works effectively in the representation of time that is violently disrupted and of space which is the location of contestation, of power-conflicts over historical time, as in the case of multi-ethnic America and equally, if not more, multi-ethnic political space like the North East of India. This feature is eminently characteristic of narratives portraying aspirations of the culturally and politically marginalized, and of literature engaged in the imaginative construction of the nation-space in a world negotiating the global from the perspective of the local.

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THREE WOMEN'S STAND FOR EMPOWERMENT

SONA ROY

The title of this Refresher Course *Time : Space : Text* recalls to mind a play by Chetana theatre-group titled *Marich Sangbad*, which I saw over three decades ago in Calcutta. In this play, three episodes from different periods and different places are yoked together by the theme of intimidation : Marich and Ravana from the epic *Ramayana*, Mir Jafar and Clive from 18th century Bengal, a conscientious American objector to the war in Vietnam and the Government's representative from the mid-twentieth century. Each episode ends with the same visual image: the ungodly pointing an admonitory forefinger at the cowering representative of the righteous, reflecting the (temporary) victory of evil over good down the ages.

In my lecture I would like to consider the reverse angle : three women who have the courage and

determination to challenge the political and social order that deprives them of justice and relegates them to the margin : Aeschylus' *Clytemnestra*, Shakespeare's *Goneril* and Tagore's *Chandalika*.

Let us begin with *Clytemnestra*, Queen of Argos, as presented by the dramatist Aeschylus in the *Oresteian* trilogy at Athens in 458 B.C. It is interesting to note that, in Homeric legend, the killing of Agamemnon was a dynastic matter, executed by his cousin Aegisthus, with no mention of his wife's participation. Agamemnon's son Orestes returns home in due course and kills Aegisthus; the early tales merely mention that he slew the tyrant's paramour and performed his mother's funeral rites. But Aeschylus in the trilogy's first play titled *Agamemnon* gives a full-length portrayal of the Queen. She is the regent in the absence of her husband, during the ten year war with Troy, and the play begins with the arrival of the news of victory – by means of a relay of beacon fires from Troy to Argos in one night. The beacon-relay is Aeschylus' invention but the detailed report of this chain serves to establish *Clytemnestra*'s intelligence and powers of administration. Indeed, the watchman admits that in her " woman's heart / A man's will nurses hope."¹

The Chorus of Argive Elders are perturbed from the very beginning by the one dark act in Agamemnon's past – the sacrifice of his eldest daughter *Iphigenia* before the Greek host sailed for Troy. Indeed, the first *stasimon* gives a detailed account of the sacrifice, with *Clytemnestra* on stage, her back to the Chorus, apparently engaged in prayer. They believe that crime does not go unpunished – the fall of Troy proves it. What then do the Gods have in store for the victorious King ? Agamemnon returns, is welcomed publicly by his wife and persuaded by her to enter the palace, reluctantly walking on crimson tapestries – an act of honour which he himself admits is the due of gods, not men. He is murdered while helpless

in the bath, and then the palace doors open to reveal Clytemnestra standing over the murdered bodies of Agamemnon and his mistress Cassandra, Princess of Troy. The Queen boldly addresses the Chorus, admitting her deed, describing in detail the three thrusts with which she stabbed him to death – taking full responsibility as the planner and perpetrator of this intrigue, rather than the mere accomplice of Aegisthus.

Here where I struck I stand and see my task achieved.

Yes, this is my work, and I claim it.²

When the Chorus, the King's men, denounce Clytemnestra for slaying her husband, she retorts :

Why, once before, did you not dare oppose this man?

...

He was the one you should have driven from Argos; he,

Marked with his daughter's blood, was ripe for punishment.³

Aeschylus has chosen the killing of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra in the first play and of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes in the second play of the trilogy to develop the thesis that private vengeance only leads to blood-feuds and chaos, that the task of punishing the murderer should be handed over to a state-organ like the Court of Areopagus. But he allows the Queen to reveal her motives for the long deliberated act. Her stand is that Agamemnon had tricked her cruelly ten years ago: in order to bring Iphigenia to the Bay of Aulis, a message had been sent to Clytemnestra that Achilles refused to join the host unless he were wed to the princess. The

Queen had sent her first-born suitably decked for the wedding, only to learn that she had been sacrificed in full view of the Greek army on the order of her father the King.

The guile I used to kill him
He used himself the first,
When he by guile uprooted
The tender plant he gave me,
And made this house accurst.
When on my virgin daughter
His savage sword descended,
My tears in rivers ran;
If now by savage sword-thrust
His ageing days are ended,
Let shame and conscience ban
His boasts, where he pays forfeit
For wrong his guile began.⁴

The Chorus admit the logic of her complaint and are confused as to what is Right or *dike* but they remain loyal to the King. With his death, her authority fades and she has to look to Aegisthus and his guards for support. The play ends with the Chorus yielding to superior force but waiting for the return to Argos of Agamemnon's son Orestes.

Let us turn to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lear's injustice to Cordelia draws sympathy of one and all yet the injustice to Goneril is hardly noticed. In the first scene of the play, *King Lear* addresses the *Princess Goneril* as "Our eldest-born" and then orders her to declare her love for him before the Court — as though she were a pet trained to perform tricks in front of guests. She is on parade and obeys his wish, delivering a well-rehearsed speech.

"Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;

Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;

Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;

No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;

As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;

A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;

Beyond all manner of so much I love you."⁵

(I, i, 54 – 60)

And what is her reward? She is branded as a flatterer both by Cordelia and critics for all succeeding ages. Moreover, she is reduced from the special status of the "eldest-born" to that of *one* of the daughters, given one-third of the kingdom, which is later enlarged to one-half, because of Cordelia's banishment.

Let us view the situation from Goneril's point of view. She is the eldest; Lear has no sons; she has naturally expected to reign over the *whole* kingdom after his death, since dividing the kingdom was not the rule. Yet here he is depriving her of her rightful possessions, not even through displeasure but merely to gratify a whim, and no one grieves for her. Had it been the case of a son passed over in favour of a daughter, perhaps some male critic would have noticed Lear's dispossession of his first-born. Moreover, the love-test is a trap; if Goneril fails to please Lear with words, she may well lose the portion earmarked for her (as happens to Cordelia shortly after). The speech, then, is not that of a wicked daughter out to defraud a doting father with a false show of love. Rather, it is occasioned by a battle of wits between Lear (who would love to exalt the youngest over the other two) and Goneril,

the eldest-born , who is fighting to retain her truncated patrimony.

After that one speech (ll.54 – 60) Goneril remains a silent spectator on stage till l.280, when the Court is adjourned; the others leave and she can speak her mind freely to Regan, who is now her equal. She has had time to assess the situation and her immediate concern is to safeguard her prestige and authority ; she anticipates trouble and her fears become fact in Act I, sc iii. Lear does not spend his days of retirement in prayer or philosophical discourse. Instead, his sojourn in her house with his hundred knights hampers the exercise of her sovereign sway, both as ruler and as mistress of the household :

“By day and night, he wrongs me; . . .
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
On every trifle.”

(I, iii, 4 – 8)

The use of the royal ‘we’ or ‘us’ is significant. In fact, Lear’s presence creates a rival centre of authority within a limited space, and leads to an inevitable confrontation. Prof. Molly Mahood delivered a talk at Calcutta University (on Mon.9.12.1991) entitled “When and Where of Shakespearean Tragedy” in which she pointed out that the Great Hall of a castle, in ancient times, served both as the kitchen / banquet-hall as well as the council-chamber. On stage, Lear can be *seen* to usurp Goneril’s authority, simply by occupying the chair reserved for the head of the house, instead of the chair on the left of the hostess, which was normally kept for the chief guest. Lear is like the mother who visits her son’s house and then proceeds to take over the running of the kitchen, countermanding the orders of the daughter-in-law! Lear is like the retired Professor who, on being invited to

attend a Board of Studies meeting in his former Department, carelessly takes the Head's seat, usurping the authority of the new Head and younger colleague. The fact is that Lear's presence undermines Goneril's position but she is not bold enough to tackle Lear directly; she can only advise her steward Oswald to treat Lear with "weary negligence" in the hope that he would feel slighted and leave for Regan's house.

Lear does not admit his changed status as a guest; when Goneril's steward Oswald addresses him as "My Lady's father" Lear feels insulted, abuses and even strikes the servant of his hostess. Kent, the newest addition to Lear's retinue, aids and abets him. Since he is in disguise, Kent would appear to be a lowly serving-man and his tripping-up of Goneril's steward can be justly termed as 'riotous' behaviour. It is worth recalling here that, in Act II, sc ii, when the disguised Kent again assaults Oswald in the house of Gloucester, the 'fiery' Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband, has no hesitation in putting him in the stocks, for disturbing the peace, knowing full well that Kent is a servant of Lear.

Shakespeare probably read John Higgins' edition of *The Mirror For Magistrates* (1574) in which Cordila says that Lear spent six months with Goneril, then she reduced his train of three score knights and squires.⁶ Shakespeare reduces the period of stay to less than a month and increases the number of dependants, to make Goneril's impatience more culpable — but does she really deserve Lear's outburst? When Goneril advises Lear to reduce his train and keep about him men of his own age, he responds with hideous rage, calling on Nature to make her barren or let her pregnancies miscarry! A father uttering such curses — yet critics accept Lear's assessment of Goneril as a 'monster'.

Goneril and Regan are bracketed together in popular imagination as the 'wicked' sisters but it is worth noting

that Shakespeare himself presents Regan as the less dutiful daughter. Indeed, Regan strikes the nail on the head with her shrewd assessment of the situation :

"How, in one house,
Should many people, under two commands,
Hold amity? 'Tis hard: almost impossible."

(*II, sc iv, ll 238 – 240*)

Goneril is also unfortunate in her marriage. The Duke of Albany is a meek, God-fearing man, unfit to govern. In contrast, the Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband, is a man of action. He approves Regan's strategy in choosing to meet her father in Gloucester's house, not her own. He does not hesitate to exercise his authority and puts Kent in the stocks for disturbing the peace.. In Act II, sc. iv, when Lear curses the absent Goneril in their presence, Cornwall is moved to protest. When Lear storms out of Gloucester's house, Cornwall supports the sisters' move to reduce Lear's train as 'politic'. It is Regan who whittles Lear's train to five-and-twenty, then ten, then five and finally asks "What needs one?" But Lear has no curses for her comparable to the tirade he had earlier launched against his 'eldest-born'. He storms out in high rage, though there is a storm brewing and, again, it is Regan who counsels Gloucester to "Shut up your doors" against his return. The madness of Lear in the heath in Act III is Shakespeare's invention; even if it is regarded as a natural consequence of his daughters' unkindness, surely Regan is more culpable than Goneril for the same.

Goneril makes a brief appearance in Act III ; Cornwall informs her that the French army has landed in England and Goneril leaves for home, with Edmund as her escort. It may be noted that it is not Goneril but Regan who relishes the blinding of the 'traitor' Gloucester. Goneril is attracted to Edmund, who contrasts favourably with

the 'cowish' Albany; but in Act IV sc. i she is chiefly concerned with the political situation, as befits the ruler. She is openly contemptuous of Albany's manhood but her hopes of an affair are frustrated by the untimely death of Cornwall. This brings Regan and Edmund together, as the commander of the forces of Cornwall; when Albany refuses to accept the low-born Edmund as an equal in council, Regan offers to marry him and Goneril is thus betrayed both by her sibling and her paramour. As Lear's daughter she has no softness in her ; she poisons her rival Regan. In Act V, sc. i , when Edmund is mortally wounded by Edgar and Albany reads her intercepted letter, she makes a defiant exit, refusing to offer excuses for her conduct and it is reported that she has ended her life by stabbing herself – not for fear of the consequences but, perhaps, because life is no longer worth living.

In conclusion, it may be recalled that even in the sixteenth century, politics and sentiment hardly worked in tandem. In 1554, the Catholic Queen Mary ordered the execution of her cousin, Lady Jane Grey; Queen Elizabeth I kept her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, in captivity for nineteen years, from the age of 26 to the age of 45, before signing her death-warrant in 1587. Yet no one talks of them as monsters of cruelty or unnatural hags. Such condemnation is reserved for Goneril alone.

Let us turn from Europe to India, from the 16th century to the 20th century and Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali dance-drama *Chandalika* (*The Untouchable Girl*). The heroine Prakriti is humiliated by the village girls, who advise the flower-sellers, the curd-seller and the bangle-seller not to let Prakriti handle their wares, else no one will buy them. She cries out against this injustice :

He who sent me into this dark (world) of insults,
I shall not worship, I shall not worship, I shall not
worship that God.⁷

She is estranged from her mother because she refuses to accept the stigma of untouchability which the upper-caste Hindus have heaped on them for generations. Tagore shows Prakriti awakening to a sense of selfhood through her contact with the enlightened Buddhist monk Ananda, who accepts her as a human being and drinks water from her hands. She dances in exultation :

Just one handful of water
Washed away the black stain of my previous
births...⁸

When her mother upbraids her for not performing the chores allotted to the untouchables, Prakriti replies :

He has said to me,
‘Do not debase yourself.
You belong to the human race,
human blood flows in your veins ...
Oh mother, for shame, do not debase yourself,
That is a sin...
I am not a *chandali*...⁹

In her new awareness of herself as a person, as a woman, she seeks to ensnare Ananda and bind him to herself, even demanding that her mother use her magic spells to accomplish the deed. But when she sees Ananda encircled in flames – metaphoric representation of lust – she is repelled by her own desire, begs her mother to recall her spells and prays that Ananda may emerge triumphant, over himself. The ballet ends with Prakriti prostrating herself at the feet of Ananda, who blesses her and departs.

It is worth noting that all these characters – Clytemnestra, Goneril and Chandali – have been visioned by men living in a patriarchal society, yet they

are presented as seeking a space for themselves, even by defying the law of the land. Tagore, a subject in colonial India, unfailingly asserted his conviction that widespread social and religious reform was necessary as a precursor to political independence, for the establishment of a truly 'free' and democratic society. Through this dance-drama, Tagore exhorts the educated, upper classes to throw off their age-old prejudices and raise up the under-privileged sections of society — yet even after six decades of Independence, his dream remains unrealized. However, it may serve as an eye – opener to all societies : unless the majority becomes aware of the deep feelings of alienation it engenders, through a regular, inexorable persecution of the minority community, it will always exist on the brink of a dormant volcano of its own making.

Notes and References

1. All quotations of the text are from Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, Penguin Books, UK 1977.
2. *Agamemnon*, p.90
3. *ibid*, p.92
4. *ibid*, p.95
5. All quotations of the text are from *King Lear*, (ed.) Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare, London 1987
6. *King Lear*, Appendices, p.227
7. Tagore, R. "Chandalika", *Gitobitan*, Calcutta 2002, p.587. All quotations from the original Bengali have been translated by me.
8. *ibid* , p.589.
9. *ibid*, p.591

INTERPRETING INTERPRETATION : INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

NIRMALYA NARAYAN CHAKRABORTY

Interpretation is an inescapable fact. In the intersubjective milieu we are constantly engaged in interpreting others. We interpret others' words, actions. We also interpret our own behaviour in our reflective mood. If we treat the whole world as a creation/text (following *Atharva Veda* where it is said "*pasya devasya kavyam*"), then the whole world is before us waiting to be interpreted. It is a text that we, the readers, try to decipher, try to understand what is conveyed by it. Many interesting ideas are associated with this notion of interpretation. Does interpretation involve some kind of decoding? Is the meaning or the content hidden behind the codes? If the answer is yes, then the question would arise regarding the nature of the relation of the structure of meaning and the structure of the code. Of course, the

big question that looms large is about the logic and possibility of interpretation. Associated with this is the issue about the limits of interpretation. In the present paper, I would like to focus on the notion of interpretation in the context of Indian Philosophy. The way Indian philosophy has historically developed leaves enough space for a significant interplay of interpretation. The origin of each of the schools of Indian philosophy consists in a number of aphorisms (*sutras*) that are usually very cryptic and precise. A *sutra* is defined as

Svalpaksaramasandigdham saravad visvatomukham I
Astobhamanavadyamca sutram sutravido viduh II

An aphorism is a small expression. It is of the nature of certitude and tells us the main thesis. It is also amenable to many interpretations and does not contain any redundant expression. An aphorism is also free from error.

Naturally this aphorism calls for explanation and we get that in what is called *bhasya*, which is defined as:

sutrartho varnyate yatra padaih sutranusaribhih I
Svapadani ca varnyante bhasyam bhasyavidoviduh II

Bhasya is a work where the meaning of the aphorism is explained following the spirit of the aphorism. *Bhasya* also explains the meaning of the words that *Bhasya* itself uses.

Even this is not enough. Many doubts and queries still persist and so we get what is called *varttika* which is defined as:

uktanuktaduruktarthacinii yatra pravartate I
tam grantham vartikam prahuh vartikajna
manisinah II

Varttika explains what has been said in the *bhasya*; it also explains what has not been explained in the *bhasya*.

Varttika explains those places of *bhasya* where there is room for doubt.

The massive amount of literature that we get in Indian Philosophical corpus is thus the result of constant interpretation and reinterpretation of the original aphorisms. This interpretative tradition has continued for almost two thousand years.

A contemporary Indian philosopher¹ has tried to argue against some of the commonly held opinions about Indian philosophy. It is popularly held that 1. Indian philosophy is spiritual in nature; 2. Indian philosophy is based on the authority of the Vedas and 3. Indian philosophy consists of a number of clearly delimited schools. It is not my aim to enter into a detail analysis of all these three 'myths'. I shall try to extract some ideas of interpretation from a rather brief deliberation of these commonly held views about Indian philosophy. It is argued that it is extremely difficult to identify a set of doctrines or a set of basic texts that each school of thought might be said to stand for. What should count as *Vedas*? Can we include the Mantras, Brahmanas, the Upanisads and even the various texts centered round the Vedas? The main problem lies in identifying a text. The identity and identifiability of a text or a subtext is what is in question. The demarcating line between a text and other coordinate subtexts is difficult to draw. It is not unreasonable to think that many of the ancient texts have undergone changes due to additions and compilations. May be a new way of looking at the texts is the need of the hour.

The commonly held view about the division of different strands in Indian philosophy is that there are

1. Daya Krishna, 'Three myths about Indian Philosophy', in his *Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991

six Vedic systems and three non-Vedic systems in Indian philosophy. Now certainly this is not an exhaustive list. Madhavacharya's *Sarvadarsanasamgraha* lists many other important schools of Indian philosophy. Nonetheless it is important to remember that philosophical debate took place remaining within one's own system. But the systems are not exclusively closed ones. One could give several examples from history of Indian philosophy where individual philosophers, remaining within their own systems, argued against some of the conclusions of their own systems. Still those individual philosophers showed their allegiance to the systems perhaps because they share the main concerns and some basic positions of the system. Many Nyaya philosophers argued against some of the interpretations of Nyaya tenets proposed by fellow Nyaya philosophers. The scene in Vedanta is more interesting for here we find ten different sub-schools all trying to interpret the original Vedanta aphorisms. In some cases some Vedanta philosophers developed their own logic to defend their epistemological and logical theses. But all of them are Vedantins, perhaps because they try to address the same set of questions.

It is worthwhile to remember that interpretative traditions and discourse develop within a large tradition. To take an example from Indian philosophy: It is only within the set of large questions that were opened up in the *Upanisads*, which themselves form part of the Vedic corpus, that *Brahmasutras* make an attempt to pose certain questions and offer certain theses. It is through the works of later commentators that distinct systems came into being. The commentators opened up new possibilities of thinking against the horizon of possibilities. Although they maintained their allegiance to the specific schools, they were constantly trying to enlarge the horizon of possibilities. Interpretation takes place in the

background of a tradition. Similarly we have two different lines of interpretation (the Bhamati school and the Vivarana school) of the same commentary of Samkaracharya and both trying to get the original intention of the author. The Indian philosophical tradition was not entirely blind to the individual's differences with his fellow philosophers within the same school. One can also think of the two (there is a third one too) sub-schools of Mimamsa philosophy where both the lines of interpretation are trying to get the meaning and significance of the original *Mimamsa sutras*. All these examples show that while Indian philosophy developed on the basis of the ideas that each school adhered to, the uniqueness or originality of individual philosopher *qua* individual was not absent. Interpretation does not take place *sui generis*. It is only against the background of an interpretative tradition or lineage that new ways of looking at the original concerns takes place. It is only through the interpretative legacy which tradition has left behind that it is possible for us to get at the meaning of the founding literature. It hardly makes sense to engage in interpretation from an a-temporal and a-historical point of the view. We think and interpret from within a tradition, but while interpreting the tradition itself gets reinterpreted maintaining at the same time a sense of identity that runs through all these changes. There is a constant play of identity and innovation. It is better to look at tradition not as a set of fixed a-historical ideas and documents, rather as a horizon of possibilities that looms large over the founding texts. When one set of possibilities gets actualized, new sets of possibilities emerge, possibilities that were not explicitly contained in the original texts, but perhaps hinted at or anticipated in those original works. By opening up new possibilities the tradition tries to understand itself from novel perspectives.

One popular way of talking about history of Indian philosophy is to say that there are some *astika* schools which regard the Vedas as the source of valid knowledge and there are some *nastika* schools which do not regard the Vedas as the source of valid knowledge. The problem lies in understanding the claim that Vedas are the sources of valid knowledge. Though the different *astika* systems differed among themselves about how to justify the Vedic knowledge, all of them share one thought that the veracity of the Vedic knowledge stands highest and so cannot be annulled by any other accepted sources of knowledge. The startling thing to note is that different *astika* philosophers, as diverse as one can imagine, accepted the veracity of the Vedas. It is hardly possible to make a list of doctrines that all the *astika* systems agreed upon. Even if they use the same vocabulary, they have developed such divergent views about the corresponding concepts, that it would be misleading to say that the *astika* systems share a common set of beliefs. Presence of incommensurability cannot be denied, though they were not closed systems, for we have documented history of long and forceful debates that took place among the various *astika* schools. One can look at the Vedas not as a set of unquestionable truths, but as delineating the parameters of our thought, proposing the fundamental questions and providing us with a vocabulary that our ancestors appropriated within which Indian philosophers learned to think, raised question and interpreted themselves and the surrounding world. The veracity of Vedic knowledge does not lie in its unmistakable access to truth, but in providing us, historically for the first time, with a horizon of possibilities in the background of which philosophical interpretations in Indian context started.

Viewed in this manner, the inviolability of the Vedas does not lie in their unquestionable authority, rather the

Vedic corpus, historically speaking, provides us with the parameter of thinking of ourselves and about the world. And yet the long history of interpretative tradition shows that we do not have a direct access to these founding thoughts, except through the interpretative lineage. Interpretations bridge the gap between us and the founding texts. The question about the authorship of the Vedas is philosophically un-illuminating, for this enquiry does not lead to any substantial philosophical thesis. It does not add to our understanding the interpretative tradition that originates with the founding text. Even the question, what did the author of the founding text intend to mean is rather naïve, for if the founding texts contain horizon of possibilities, then the search for *the* meaning of the text is illusive. The long interpretative tradition of Indian philosophy shows, I think, that there is always a possibility of coming up with a new interpretation, new ways of deciphering the text. If interpretation ideally aims at the meaning intended by the author himself, then the interpreter has to return to the time of the text, completely unbiased by the interpretation and the intervening literature. But then the problem, along with many other problems, is that the only way of getting at the author's intention is through the text. It must also be remembered that the text itself has a history. So the only approach that we interpreters can take to study the text is to go through the interpretative tradition. The Indian philosophical history is a good example of this. When we read *Brahmasutra*, we read it as either interpreted by Samkaracharya or Ramanujacharya etc. Indian philosophers did not pretend to go directly to the *sutras* and grasp their meanings by themselves. Thus the discovery of the meaning of the founding text is an unending process. Any claim to have reached the finality regarding interpretation is not a correct understanding of the philosophical tradition of India.

J.N.Mohanty² rightly distinguishes orthodoxy from tradition. Orthodoxy turns tradition into a fossilized, unchanging phenomenon. Orthodoxy cannot tolerate any questioning or self-criticism. And if philosophy is primarily a critical analysis, then it would be obvious that orthodoxy does not leave any room for philosophical activity. Tradition, as opposed to orthodoxy, is living in the sense that it constantly recreates itself, through self-questioning, and responding to new situations and challenges. It is only when tradition loses its dynamic and self-questioning capacity that it lapses into orthodoxy. It is only a dead tradition that needs orthodoxy to protect it from possible attacks or perversions. So a living tradition, in this sense, leaves quite a bit of room for openness and flexibility. The opposition that we talk about is not orthodoxy-modernity, for they belong to two different categorical frameworks. Philosophically interesting and insightful opposition worth discussing would rather be tradition-modernity.

If modernity means simple rejection of tradition, then the tension mentioned earlier would immediately cease to exist. And then any dialogue or mediation between the two would be out of place. This interpretation of modernity, to me, really avoids the difficult issues involved. Viewed in this way, modernity would exhaust itself in accepting the present only because it is present. And this attitude is philosophically barren.

An interesting way of understanding modernity consists in addressing oneself to what is contemporaneous. Modernity, looked in this way does not simply stand for uncritically accepting what is in fashion. Modernity addresses itself from contemporary

2 J.N.Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p.11

perspective and challenges. It reorients itself with contemporary questions. Here modernity enters into a dialogue with what is contemporaneous. Since, philosophy, in an important sense, is a kind of dialogue within oneself or inter-subjective, may be even intercultural, discourse on modernity does contribute significantly to philosophical thought. But dialogue involves questioning and scepticism, seeking clarifications and facing challenges. And it is here that tradition can play the role of interlocutor, in the dialogical activity of modernity. Modernity can very well enter into a dialogue with tradition, for tradition as distinguished from orthodoxy, is ready to face possible challenges from modernity and is contemporaneous with it. The fact that tradition can pose challenges to modernity, the fact that tradition indulges in self-criticism and becomes self-reflective, suggests that tradition and modernity after all can be partners in the advancement of human society. This is especially important in the context of Indian philosophy where the traditional questions and issues, after facing healthy challenges from modern philosophical deliberation, are reinterpreted, recreated, getting different rendering. So tradition and modernity need not be understood as involving an unbridgeable gulf.

The task of interpretation acquired a new dimension more recently when Indian philosophers got in contact with Western philosophy. There are people who think that Indian philosophy exemplifies a mode of living, where mode of thinking and mode of living cannot be divorced from each other. The traditional *pandit* lived a particular way of life, observed the required religious practices. Philosophy is continuous with a mode of living. According to these people, Indian philosophy is inseparable from its cultural environment that nurtured it. So it is impossible to pick out a proposition or a

doctrine from an Indian philosophical system and to look at it from a different philosophical background that has quite a different history, socially and culturally speaking. We have people, on the other extreme, who deny the very existence of what is generally called 'Indian philosophy'. The identity of the text known as Vedas, the identity of each of the so called 'schools' of Indian philosophy – all these are open questions. For me truth lies somewhere in between. And the historical development of Indian philosophy can teach us a lesson here. As mentioned earlier, though debates in Indian philosophy took place from within the different systems and each had its own epistemological and metaphysical baggage, there are instances where individual philosophers substantially modified their own systems by their re-interpretative stance. Their loyalty to their lineage did not make them mere record keepers. As I understand, tradition need not and must not be conflated with orthodoxy. Interpretation is an attempt on the part of tradition to understand itself. And it is an infinite ask.

One of the usual ways of distinguishing Indian philosophy from Western philosophy is by applying the label 'spiritual' to Indian philosophy which is allegedly lacking in Western philosophical pursuit. The word 'spiritual' in Indian philosophy could mean 1. Indian philosophical thoughts themselves are spiritual entities; or 2. The subject matter of this discourse is spiritual; 3. Acts of thinking, whose products are thoughts, are spiritual; 4. Philosophical thinking leads up to a goal which is spiritual; 5. One central task of philosophical thinking is to show the possibility of attaining such a spiritual goal. 1 is useless, for if thoughts as thoughts are spiritual, then all thoughts are so, and not only Indian philosophical thoughts. 2 is partially true, for Indian philosophical systems do talk about spiritual entities like *atman*. If the question about *atman* is divided into several

sub-questions, as has been done in Indian philosophical systems, like, is *atman* individuated or is it one entity present in all sentient beings; or is consciousness an intrinsic property of *atman* or is *atman* different from the psycho-physical complex called body etc., then it becomes fuzzy to determine which of these questions is identical with the question 'Is *atman* spiritual'? In the senses of 2 and 3 Indian philosophy is spiritual, but then these are philosophically uninteresting claims and they fail to show how Indian philosophy is different from Western philosophy, a task which they were called for. Indian philosophy can very well be called spiritual in the sense of 4 and 5. It must however be noted here that even the most conservative of Indian philosophers would not claim that there is a cause-effect relation between philosophy and attainment of the highest end viz. *moksa* which is spiritual in nature. The Upanisadic three tier means of attaining the knowledge of *atman* should not be forgotten. The first stage is *sravana* where the relevant texts are to be studied under a teacher. Then comes *manana* where philosophical reflection is carried out on what is learnt. Here one is supposed to find arguments in support of a thesis and he is also supposed to find arguments by which the impossibility of a position can be removed. The next stage is *nididhyasana* where meditation on the thesis proved is performed. The tortuous intellectual process ends with *manana* and the path after *manana* to *moksa* through *nididhyasana* is something that is beyond the scope of philosophy. So even if we accept that Indian philosophy is spiritual in the sense we are discussing now, philosophy is never regarded as a cause of *moksa*. And it is too well known to mention that persons without any knowledge of philosophical sophistication have allegedly attained *moksa* by some other extraordinary means. What at best could be said is that one central function of Indian philosophy

is to demonstrate the possibility of the highest goal in human life viz. *moksa* which certainly is spiritual in nature. But then the alleged description of Indian philosophy as spiritual loses much of its point, for philosophical speculation about something spiritual in nature can very well be found in Western philosophical tradition and that does not make Western philosophical pursuit any less philosophical in nature*.

* Much of what has been said in the present paper has been inspired by J.N.Mohanty's works. See his *Explorations in Philosophy: Indian Philosophy*, ed. by Bina Gupta, New Delhi, Oxford university Press, 2001

REFLECTIONS ON TIME

TIRTHA PRASAD MUKHOPADHYAY

The arts achieve :

- (i) integration of human attitudes on a "higher"/ i.e. demarcated fringe of consciousness, one in which all reflexive/motor impulses, like those of joy, depressions, lack & shame, or euphoria co-exist or repeat on an affective plane;
- (ii) a feeling of equanimity (ataraxic) about that experience; and,
- (iii) timelessness, as in of what Czikszentmihalyi calls "flow" experiences, in which the sense of passing time or duration is substituted – i.e. either suspended, erased, elevated, or de-activated, or as the case may be – & re-organized by another sense of the sequence or continuity of things. The "in"/ "during"-ness of "trance" occurrences (like those of incantation, theater, or song) - also known as "affect" states - produce a feeling of being "out

there", without ever distracting the mind with claims of survival or necessity, however brief.

(Introduction to Affective States in Art, Tirtha Mukhopadhyay)

Contrary to received opinion, beauty should be considered a natural phenomenon, evident universally, in leaves, or blades of grass, or in raindrops that shine, or in things ranging from the symmetry of snowflakes to the breadth of cataracts — & then in the body of animals, or across views of settlements and landscapes. Beauty is not exclusive to human art alone.

One should add a fifth component to the experience of beauty – the absence of the sense of passing time, and its substitution by a different kind of time in its place, more like a sense of delightful transition, distinct from time as stressful experience, a state of cheerfulness, temporary & vivid, like a dream.

(Essay on Beauty, Tirtha Mukhopadhyay)

1. Introduction

I have chosen a partly ambitious title for this lecture; one also partly deceptive since it aims to bypass issues which need to be handled with care, and with more assiduous study. Special attention needs to be given to the data-base from which the argument is built. Again the purpose here is to design a kind of course work lecture; rather than a colloquium. One should underscore the basic theses for a lecture in no uncertain terms. There should be no ambiguity about (a) the premises of argument/ the "logic" so to speak, even as we realize that the idea of logic itself is under scrutiny. Can we actually be logical about anything? Or ethical – is there a logic of ethics, at all? Or are we just responding to verb acts by means of integrations of linguistic or signifying components? How does consciousness actually work, how do we think by conflating memory and fresh

experiences, sensory (environmental) &/or biogenetic / environmental signals? In what sense are we conscious of time? &/or rationally describe its functions on various levels of perceivability? Next, that is point (b) in a course lecture, where it becomes incumbent upon the speaker to defend a certain point of view that is being professed, another question remains. What steps are we going to follow? The process of argument - - in its winding unloveliness will still have to draw the attention out of a deviant pathway so that we can unlearn the past, to some extent, or re-appropriate it with more acceptable statements, & to allow for things that seem more plausible. I will not follow the traditional method of stating the *purvapaksha* – that is, “what predecessors have said”, and then change/refute it. I would rather whip down on the one line of reasoning I think is true for all of us. I intend to get it across, given certain axioms. (See Sec. On locus/ loka of knowledge).

2. The Methods of Historical Science

Secondly this aims at being a lecture on the human ability to comprehend time. How do we perceive time? Let me raise this as a kind of subjective question, although not exactly in the way philosophers have raised it. What I shall be concerned with is a scientific understanding of time. But no, “scientific” is a vague word; today it hardly means (or comprehends) anything specific. There is no one approach to the notion of science other than saying that it represents a graded & domain-specific (& empirical) understanding of things, and by things we mean not just visible/perceptible stuff, but also of that which exist beyond the visibility criterion by virtue of being say a hypothetical possibility or reality, and for which the imagination toggles out into a universe of darkness and incomprehensibilities. Here science progresses by making models for itself. Visibility criteria

is also a thing of the past; science progressed beyond itself, unsuspectedly. Further, science seeks to represent the abstraction of principles governing things & their acts with adequate mathematical symbols, like binary systems for the properties of silicon VLSI-circuits; or matrices for game theoretic understanding of the market forces (CHANGE). Thirdly, science again makes valid claims for a specific domain of observed reality. The science for the silicon chip is not the same thing as the science for asexual reproduction, or as in our case the science of time measurements. Science, from the Latin *scire*, "to know", only tries to define what it observes – the correlation of that piece of knowledge to anything else in the universe comes later, and does not matter, at least not immediately.

In the history of science there has been nodal intersections or alternations of understanding where one system developed out of another. A brief example: the study of pharmacology has gained immensely out of the experiences of ancient medicine. Or more interesting still, the study of genetics from the science of breeding and hybridization. The point I am trying to get at is that the process of knowledge is continuous but then the continuity also requires completely alternated trajectories of knowledge. The past cannot be denied. The history of ideas is not a stream. Nor does it go against the current, as Berlin once said. It is like the birth of newer streams of intellect, like a river changing its course in such a manner that the former channel may leave a faint trace in some unnoticed path.

3. Neurobiology

I shall leave the array of references that this discussion entails in order to return to the question of how we comprehend time. Is the question also therefore of the cognition of time. "Cognition" because it follows the method of science. How we comprehend time becomes

no less than a question of how we as human beings get conscious of time. Dialectically speaking, therefore, the notion of our so called "consciousness" needs to be resolved before we can speculate on "consciousness of time". In recent neurobiological analyses of brain function & behavior "consciousness" turns out to be something of an enigma. Even in my more speculative and more behavioralist thesis on the cognitive process I wrote that the: "cognitive method is now known to be (at least) dualistic: we have a growing picture of the mind as a product of both (a) biological components including the highly advanced neocortex, cerebral hemispheres, neurons, neurotransmitters, and synaptic inhibitors, etc., and (b) environmentally induced factors such as learning, adaptation, defense, behavioral reflexes and so on. Previously Descartes, Kant, or Brentano held that the esthetic mind could be studied without recourse to its cortical/neurological origins – as a kind of transcendent ego"^v. The epiphenomenological perspective became more important. – mental states are side-effects of a more neurologically visible chemistry of mind. The dualistic theses is undercut by Dennett's notion of the "wordless narrative" of the mind. & Brain Skyrms analyses of greed behavior and the birth of altruism – art.

The point here again is if we can accept the consciousness thesis of the epiphenomenalist, or even behavioralist, & even Dennett, in *toto*. Perhaps the common sensibility of the artist comes as a justification for this non-acceptance. Consider, the question of consciousness once again. We cannot lose our eyes upon the radiance of truth, however blinding it might be. What is consciousness? It may be exactly like Dennett describes it:

Like fame, consciousness is not a momentary condition, or a purely dispositional state, but rather a matter of actual influence over time....again it is not so much fame, then, as political influence—a good slang term is *clout*. When

processes compete for ongoing control of the body, the one with the greatest clout dominates the scene until a process with even greater clout displaces it. In some oligarchies, perhaps, the only way to have clout is to be *known by the King*, dispenser of all powers and privileges. Our brains are more democratic, indeed somewhat anarchic. In the brain there is no King, no Official Viewer of the State Television Program, no Cartesian Theater, but there are still plenty of quite sharp differences in political clout exercised by contents over time. In Dehaene and Naccache's terms, this political difference is achieved by "reverberation" in a "sustained amplification loop" [mis, p20], while the losing competitors soon fade into oblivion, unable to recruit enough specialist attention to achieve *self-sustaining* reverberation."❧

Fred Turner more significantly reveals the necessity of the hierarchy of brain functions. Polanyi does that just like Wertheimer. I will refer fleetingly to these thinkers here, just for our awareness. Even Patanjali starts down from the pre-natural level of being, in the bed of the Gunas. Also Vyasa & Tagore. More powerfully than all is perhaps, Patanjali himself, the task of translating the first paspasa of the Bhasya has not been undertaken, not least with its immensely relevant insights into cognitive behaviorialism, in the way Chomsky wanted in the essay on natural language. But consciousness may be sentience, the word consciousness, as it is defined in contemporary neurobiology, or even in computational neuroscience, does not explain anything more than the "phenomenon" or condition of the emerging responsiveness of an organism, & toward the environment to which it is either rooted, and toward the "future" or temporal conditionalities to which its evolution is oriented. Because the human being constitutes an "intelligent system", a *prana* or graded, or hierarchical and organizing process of heuristics for itself, achieved with the resources of

neural transmissions, but far exceeding the initial characteristics of that system in its higher and more complicated activities of referencing. Let me explain. The "mind" – as Patanjali may be result/consequence/effect of the neural network, but the terms on which it has to be discussed are not that of the brain *per se*. Therefore in order to understand characteristics of consciousness where we need to reference (a) to the properties of squid neurons, the membranes, axon, or the ionic pathways etched out by neurotransmitters in order to describe how something like an integrated circuit for the brain develops – in order to understand products of consciousness we have to reference (b) to sensory-motor visibility, recognition, memory, imagination, non-visual dream activity etc to understand how the "mind" itself works. The question of the mind appears on a different/hierarchical level of consciousness. Thus the process of discussion, and therefore of the acquisition of knowledge cannot be continued without switching from one frame of reference to another, and without switching to the appropriate frame in which a particular issue should be discussed. The process of knowledge is hierarchical and discrete; it is domain-specific, discontinuous and emergent. The "consciousness" of time has to be analyzed in relation to the human ability to process and integrate a mental, or mind-induced perception of something commonly accepted as time, or as natural time.

Also given the fact that we acknowledge the existence of higher order functions we begin to see how precisely we become conscious of time. Time is perceived by us (a) by means of a stable, sane, environmentally defined sensibility — just that human sense of being, and of existence when life seems "normal", "as-is-anticipated", "logical" and with the un-articulated consensus about a sense of that's-how-life-is-exactly. This is perhaps what Socrates referred to as "common-sense", one that is by

no means "common". Very few people have patience for it. It is to me a state of knowledge or intuition of things — one to which I suspect, may be collated the condition of a *loka*. It is no less than amazing, and even terrible, that all the bits of information available about the world in which we live and breathe, this large canvas of things, extended without limit and circumscription — and including everything from the visible microbe, or the particle of sand and enabling, as it were, a view of the infiniteness of the sky — is also, as it were, no more than a product of a condition or state of perceivability mapped by the brain's infinitesimal circuits, and orchestrating with the help of given methods of integration and/or selection, a *sense* of things, or external objects or, as it happens in this case, of time as a kind of continuum or otherwise. The *loka* is the moment of convergence where our impressions and memory get cropped or manipulated to enable the performance of just those kinds of perceptive acts that typify the human mind and imagination, and its "temporal umwelt" (Fraser) including as it does those intricate notions of phenomenal time and every other kind of time-act that form worlds for themselves, the juxtapositions of the complex, relative time of observers placed at different perspectives of space and time, the knowledge of mythical "heavenly" time, eternity, or the irretrievable journey of creation. The *loka* of being, the *ihaloka*, the *this-loka*, or "this-space" is a kind of mind act that lets us think about time in the way we do.

Now therefore, first there is (a) sentience — the ground, primitive, animal, phantasmal sense of being there, an electrical and pendant side-effect of life floating over the psycho-somatic tree that we are; next (b) there is a kind of ego-formation, the constructive act of being there, produced and regulated by (either homeostatic / non-homeostatic) needs of survival, or maintenance, sex, sleep, mimicry, or other discharge activities.

Sentience

Among all other alternatives it is the organismic and evolutionary concept of time that seems plausible. Animal time means time as any animal, specific to its evolutionary status, perceives it. The sentience of time forms a kind of substrate on the nervous system. Humans would have to regain the idea of this basic or primitive sentience by getting dormant, inactive and by means of passive abstraction. What happens just as one rests, and lets impressions simply dawn by themselves. A blue darkness falls. The bits of meteor cross in random haze as retinal process influences strange visions of change, swirl, movement, like a stream of lucent things, and a rim of faint understandings – that is sentience. Like Patanjali if one meditates in order to know how a cat, or a snail feels, or looks at time – the question that is raised is if at all they know what time could be, a least as humans can see or quantify it. Under such condition time has not arisen at all, or is just yet to rise. The process of time here is passive; lower animals do not know about the passage and complexity of time, or about the linearity of time – they exist only with a sense of being, not like the sophisticated being of existentialist philosophy but the slow and causeless being of biological entities, just as if they were living under a mode of sustenance, primitive and emergent. Only when the notion of conscious sentience, as a kind of (epiphenomenal?) bed of time is acknowledged that we can go on to discuss the nature of the more constructed notions of time, like those which are produced by organismic intervention.

Hominid Time

This ego could be a desiring, or preferred state of perception, induced by say, fear, or procreative attraction, or as in case of sportive and artistic activities, defined by

its functional requirements. Thus for e.g any higher animal would associate the amount of light in the atmosphere with degrees of threat or other kinds of danger, and might accordingly form notions of time cycle and its corresponding adaptive behavior. The homing and incubation of eggs is an animal behavior that might fall under this category of temporal association. But again reaping and harvesting at appropriate times of seasons is a more complex and sustained example of this kind of temporal strategy. Thus alone then that the self-generative, proactive ego works - by cropping memory and neurological data. Cropping implies a combination of activities that constitute a sense of time: that time is more like a "sense" rather than a linear continuum, with measurable units, is perhaps more fundamental, more important for the human condition. Even if there is something like an objective, independent linear time in the universe, one in which a human being takes birth, lives, and then perishes, it is still dependent on the perceptive world that we possess. Scientific models go to the extent of saying that time might not be linear at all. That time might be concentric; that the perception of time may be relative etc. such a debate complicates issues and are yet to be resolved with finality. The human sense of time is acquired by (i) abstraction of a notion of real-time (ii) forgetting / selection of components from a bed of memory. (iii) sequencing (which depends on the experience of the real world) / & the experience of causality / logic (iv) inference from perceptions of recurrence (v) suspension of events in / by a sense of time. Further (c) is there a clock area in the brain, an innate neurobiological timepiece?

In spite of such things, a certain residual notion of time remains, a residue which should better go by the name of essence, although it would be absurd to refer to anything as essence in cognitive science. Especially, since

the word represents "essence" a spiritual concept. The time faculty emerges in human consciousness even after every other kind of abstraction has been done and completed. Consider how the human mind perceives time from its ruminative listlessness after acts of feeding. The great clock of the mind may be biological as I just said, following Uxkull & Turner, but we cannot deny that the processing of time signals may also belong to a sequence in a real world. If we start by abstracting notions then we end up with such natural clocks like the diurnal motion, or planetary rotation, or the heart beat, or arterial pulse. Are these recurrent events, along with the regular intervals that they trace, a fundamental reality outside of our minds and of which we as humans have either full or incomplete knowledge? If a chimpanzee built an hourglass, and we looked at it, or if we left it behind, the sand would still drip, without consulting us, and do so in accordance to some infallible time-law of the universe. If on the one hand the mind were to be abstracted from such natural clocks, the clocks would still run unrelentingly it would seem. Secondly, if nature itself were to be abstracted from such a clock the time-line that it represented would still be true. Even if the suspicion about time returning upon us were to be eliminated or kept at abeyance, or the promise that the fear of night will be dispelled by the dawn's first lights not to be fulfilled anymore, or the silky translucence of outer space, and the warp of stars, all extracted out by a giant who kept a watch over everything that existed, then too uncannily perhaps, the ghost of linear time would linger, unerringly, unaccompanied, free: tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. But what is more magical about the universe is that the human (anthropic) observer has acquired a mental sense of this time. As if even *in extremes* single weds itself with single, & nothing weds with nothing.

5. The Sense of Time in Art

Aesthetics of time presumes what happens to time while we enjoy certain activities, like ritual, or mimicry (including dance-forms/theater). I speculated that theater/drama/ the narrative all seemed to have their origins in stronger, more impactful incantatory modes like (a) incantation / chant (b) music. The stuff of all art forms is affect/trance : art is essentially a delightful experience. If there is no affective condition present during the art experience, it will not qualify as art. It is true that there are a range of actions which give us pleasure: feeding / eating/ taste delicious food /romance/ sex (very important)/sports activities etc. In all such actions, especially those producing enjoyment, the sense of time is relegated to a subordinate station. The sense of duration of time is suppressed. These are flow experience in the sense that attention flows or diverts to the aesthetic mode and delightfulness, exhilaration acquires value. Those activities which give us pleasure e.g. sports, listening to music, watching movies, sex are in particular marked by the suspension of the primacy of time. The body, and the entire mechanism of psychosomatic reflexes seek more and more of such experience, and want to continue to be under a condition of hallucination/trance for the extent through which they run. The start and end points of aesthetic duration are blurred. Blurring is highly desirable. Overdoing things produces obsessive-compulsive behaviors

I will conclude with a brief suggestion for research. It is a very significant suggestion I believe because it involves two principles that have the ability to influence the decision of all humanists of all of the world. Now, aesthetic "flow" experiences cannot extend indefinitely in time. Since hominid behavior is both complicated and motivated a combination of factors may work at the same

time to produce characteristics of attitude, reflexes, intentions, and operational modules, either sustained or simple. But for the extent to which artistic enjoyment is acquired enjoyment itself matters more than other notions of survival/attention that need to be done on time. The suspension of the phenomenon of duration is enabled by the nature of art-experiences where the state of affective response becomes desirable and is therefore sustained. The upshot of this argument is that in art duration is opposed to being, delight to necessity, attentiveness to uncontrolled dissipation of somatic impulses.

[But what happens: consider this carefully. Of the various perceptive modes for time mentioned here perhaps a very important one, and one which I am inclined to pick is *sequencing*. vide : Section on cropping.

The traditional sequence may be represented by the symbols X, Y, Z...etc etc.

Within a single interval the sequencing may take the form X, Y...

If X = shooting and Y = hitting target

Then,

normal sequencing activity takes the form $X > Y$

(i.e.) X causes Y or X tends to Y.

Human Memory stores this experience and during later occasions crops it as $X > Y$, or shooting results in or follows on to hitting target. Therefore shooting "precedes" targeting.

In aesthetic / "flow" experiences

$X > Y$ may be reversed.

As for ritual, take an example from Christianity. In common perception God created man. $God > Man$

In Christianity $Man > God$, man creates god, i.e. gives birth to God in one's heart. Man begets God.

In Hinduism

Dwija / Brahman / to be born a second time.

Chanting enables re-birth. Chant creates the sense of Brahman/God. Chant > Brahman.

In aesthetic / "flow" experiences

$X > Y$ may be reversed.

But in experiences like the following:

X = crafting the body on stage

Y = enjoyment / laughter

Experience stores this as $X > Y$ but experiences this as

$Y > X$ where enjoyment is the cause / purpose of action and the initial or raw matter, the normal human action reflected on stage is the effect.

Under this kind of sequencing the end product, that is affect / pleasure or art is the cause of. And justification for, and therefore precedent on, the event or action portrayed.

In border experiences such those of ritual and art, the normal sequencing activity of memory is reversed. This anticipates a new kind of association about the sense of time. Studying this reversal of sequencing is the prerogative of the humanities.]

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ANN – ARTIFICIAL NEURAL NETWORKS

BIOLOGICAL NEURAL NETWORKS= ARTIFICIAL COMPUTATIONAL= PARALLEL PROCESSING OF SUBTASKS

BNN (above) is OPPOSED TO CONNECTIONIST APPROACHES?

ψ This position is summarized by Brentano in the 1880s by Brentano's classic rejection of the study of perceptive mechanism from the perspective of genetic/biological sciences. Brentano advocated a science of the pure mind, transcendent and bearer of principles which could fully explain the faculties and functions of the mind. Brentano's thesis led to the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl. Contrasted to such approaches, as Frederick Turner critiques it in *Meaningful Art in a Meaningful Universe: the Fallacies of Abstractionist Ideology* (2004) is the esthetics of Konrad Lorenz, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, or Michael Polanyi. All of them start from a basic anthropological-psychological substrate of knowledge in order to speculate how humans engage in affective acts, playing "roles", or representing, or visualizing gestures, attitudes, states of being, indicating how arts are born, and the principles of artistic pursuits as a whole.

ψ <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/cognition.fin.htm>.

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